

TEIVIELAIS

AND THE SHROUD OF CHRIST

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The Templars and The Shroud of Christ

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"...the track of its course through the generations is not that of earthly glory and earthly power, but the track of the Cross."

Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*,

P. 346

"The Cross alone is our theology." Martin Luther, *Operationes in Psalmos*, WA 5, 176, 32-33

Introduction

As I worked on this essay, I noticed a curious fact. Several experts who had glanced at the title whilst being shown the work, got the immediate impression that it dealt with the Turin Shroud as the true funeral shroud of Jesus Christ.

I therefore feel the need to warn the reader from the very first page that the title says *The Templars and the Shroud of Christ* because these mediaeval warrior monks did almost certainly keep for some time the Shroud, and contemplated in it the evidence that the Christ (not simply Jesus of Nazareth) had indeed passed through death.

The reader may think this a futile distinction, but it is not, and this book will give ample reasons for this.

The question of whether the Shroud of Turin is genuine or not is still open, and at any rate, beyond the purpose of this book. What my research sought to study is the cult of the Shroud among the Templars, there is no doubt that as far as the Templars were concerned, the cloth came from the Holy Sepulchre and had been used to wrap the body of Christ before he rose from the dead. This reality forces the readers to put themselves, as it were, in the shoes of the Templar Knights, even if they have to pretend to believe something they don't. If we wish to study a certain world and understand the way it thought, we must make ourselves at one with it and try to see reality as this world saw it. Many passages in this book will, for this reason, refer to the Shroud as to the chief relic of the Passion, for that is how the Templars saw it.

In 1988 the cloth was subjected to a radio-carbon dating test called C14, which gives reliable results, albeit with some margin of uncertainty, the object has been kept in particular conditions and has not suffered contaminations from organic materials. A good example of its accuracy was an untouched Etruscan tome, sealed in the sixth century BC and only reopened by the archaeologist who discovered it. The analyses were entrusted to three laboratories that specialise in this kind of investigations, and the result they reached dated the Shroud to the later middle ages, with an approximation of 130 years (1260-1390 AD).

The issue, however, was not settled at all: while on one side the radio-carbon analyses roused a storm of polemics, since some people claimed that their method did not respect the rules of scientific procedure, on the other, many

asserted that radio-carbon simply could not give any reliable results in the matter of the Shroud, an archaeological relic that has suffered a huge number of forms of contamination and whose history is still largely to be discovered. Indeed, even the Nobel Prizewinner Willard Frank Libby, who invented and perfected the C14 archaeological dating test, had earlier declared himself against the experiment.

Under the late Pope John Paul II, who was devoted to the Shroud because it gave him a vivid and realistic sense of Jesus Christ's sufferings, the then Papal guardian of the Shroud, Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero, stated that the cloth was "A venerable icon of the Christ". Many of the faithful took these words with a tangible sense of disappointment; they had hoped for something different, hoped, in short, that the Pope should officially declare the Shroud to be the most important relic of Jesus in our possession. In those hot-headed days, it even happened that Ballestrero, until then every liberal's reactionary Catholic bogeyman should be labelled as "an Enlightenment intellectual in purple" (*La Repubblica*, 14 October 1988), a title that no priest enjoys being stuck with.

In fact, that definition of the Shroud is best understood if we try to understand the theological concept of Icon, which is not simply the same as any holy image. The Cardinal's words were not at all intended to place the Shroud on the same level as Michelangelo's Pietà, or of any work of art that can represent the Passion credibly and poetically. Christian theology, eastern theology in particular, see Icons as something else and more than images. Icons in a sense live and can give life; they can bestow real benefits on the spirit of the faithful. None of the many who have written about the Shroud noticed this fact, and yet it is not without importance. Calling it "a venerable icon" was a choice born of long, careful study by experts who certainly did not suffer from a shortage of vocabulary. That expression calls up directly the thought of the theologians of the Second Ecumenic Council of Nicaea (787 AD), to whom the prodigious image of Christ is the place where we achieve contact with the Divine; it expresses the will to look at that object in the same manner full of astonishment and wonder in which the ancient Church looked at it. It all turns on a very simple concept: to seriously study the Shroud means in any case to be meditating on the wounds of Jesus Christ. Cardinal Ballestrero's was a most delicate definition, respectful of the depths of mystery that this object involves, but possibly a bit too erudite to be universally understood. For their part, several Popes have stated their views unhesitatingly: already Pius XI had spoken of it as an image "surely not of human making", and John Paul II clearly described it as "the most splendid relic of both Passion and Resurrection" (L'Osservatore Romano, 7 September 1936 and 21-22 April 1980).

I myself suspect that there may be something else at issue. If and when the

Church ever officially declares the Shroud to be the one true winding-sheet of Jesus, it could become very difficult, maybe even impossible, to continue to make scientific studies of it. It would then be absolutely the holiest relic owned by Christendom, thick with Christ's own blood, and any manipulation would be seen as disrespectful. While Christendom still wants to examine this enigmatic object, it still has plenty of questions to ask: there is a widespread feeling that it may have plenty to tell about Roman-age Judaism, that is the very context of the life, preaching and death of Jesus of Nazareth. This, apart from any religious evaluation, is a most interesting field of study. We know very little of that period of Jewish history, because of the devastations carried out by the Roman Emperors Vespasian (70 AD) and Hadrian (132 AD), which involved the destruction of Jerusalem and all its archives and the deportation of the Jewish population away from Syria-Palestine. Some important clues to be found on the Turin sheet promise to have a lot to say about Judaic usages in the age of the Second Temple. One of ancient Hebraism's greatest historians, Paolo Sacchi, writes: "Whether we believe or not in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth, he spoke the language of his time to the men of his time, dealing directly with issues of his time" (Storia del Secondo Tempio, p. 17). If we question it delicately and respectfully, the Shroud will answer.

This book will not tackle any of the complex issues to do with the cloth's authenticity and religious significance. Anyone wishing to enlarge their understanding of these areas will find sufficient answers in the books of Monsignor Giuseppe Ghiberti, *Sindone, vangeli e vita cristiana and Dalle cose che patì* (Eb 5,8). *Evangelizzare con la sindone*. This essay is only intended as a discussion along historical lines; and there can be no doubt that, to historians, the Shroud of Turin (whatever it may be) is a piece of material evidence of immense interest.

This book is the first part of a study that is completed by a second volume, *The Shroud of Jesus of Nazareth*, dedicated entirely to the new historical questions that arise from recent discoveries made on the cloth. Some of the main arguments treated there are only hinted at here, and that was inevitable: for the argument enters into issues concerning Jewish and Greco-Roman archaeology from the first century AD, themes far too distant from the story of the Templars to place them all in a single volume.

My research began more than ten years ago, in 1996. Then, in the spring of 1998, a news program from Italy's state broadcaster, RAI, carried a story that traces of ancient writing had been identified on the linen Shroud. I was then reading for a PhD in history at the University "Ca' Foscari" of Venice, working on a thesis on the Templars. I had long since noticed that in the original

documents of the trial against them, some witnesses described an object exactly similar to the Shroud of Turin. When I heard that an Oxford graduate scholar, Ian Wilson, had found interesting suggestions that the Shroud had been among the Templars at some point, I thought of running a check on the issue and I started looking into the enigmatic Shroud writings, thinking to see whether by any chance they had not been put there by the temple's warrior monks. The results impressed me; they were so complex and involving that I decided this was going to be a long-term research project, and that I would not tackle the question until I had satisfactory evidence.

Today I think I can conscientiously say that the evidence is there, and maybe much more than I had originally hoped; and that is largely thanks to some scholars whose wonderful kindness has given precious contributions.

I wish to underline that the ideas set out in the book reflect my own opinions and are not the property or responsibility of anyone else. Whatever the value of my results, I don't think that even ten years of obstinate and passionate investigation could have led anywhere had I not had the advantage of many authoritative suggestions, advice, and sometimes illuminating criticism.

My biggest debt of gratitude is to Professor Franco Cardini, who trusted my research as it was taking its first stumbling steps, and to His Eminence Raffaele Cardinal Farina, Archivist and Librarian of the Catholic Church, who supported it when the delicate time of conclusion had come. From these two great scholars, so different from each other, yet both enamoured of the human figure of Jesus, I have learned very, very much, even on a human level.

Father Marcel Chappin SJ (vice-prefect of the Secret Vatican Archive, of the Pontifical Gregorian University) revised the book's proofs from top to bottom, enriching it with abundant clarifications and advice.

A special thanks goes to my colleagues Simone Venturini (Secret Vatican Archive) and Marco Buonocore (Apostolic Vatican Library) for the patience with which they have helped me to study Hebrew, ancient Middle Eastern civilizations, and Greco-Roman archaeology and epigraphy, which I had studied in university but had then neglected in order to dedicate myself to the Middle Ages. Emanuela Marinelli (*Collegamento pro Sindone*) has generously made available her study experience and an enormous library of specialist studies on the Shroud.

I also wish to thank Marcel Alonso (*Centre International d'Études sur le Linceul de Turin*), Gianfranco Armando (Secret Vatican Archive), Pier Luigi Baima Bollone (University of Turin), Luca Becchetti (Secret Vatican Archive), Luigi Boneschi, Fr. Claudio Bottini OFM, (*Studium Biblicum Franciscanum of Jerusalem*), Thierry Castex (*Centre International d'Études sur le Linceul de*

Turin), Simonetta Cerrini (University of Paris-IV), Paolo Cherubini (University of Palermo), Willy Clarysse (Catholic University of Louvain), Tiziana Cuccagna (Liceo Ginnasio "G.C. Tacito" di Terni), Alain Demurger, (University of Paris-IV), Ivan Di Stefano Manzella (University of Tuscia-Viterbo), Enrico Flaiani (Secret Vatican Archive), Stefano Gasparri (University "Ca' Foscari" of Venice), Giuseppe Lo Bianco (Secret Vatican Archive), don Franco Manzi (Archiepiscopal Seminary of Milan), monsignor Aldo Martini (Vatican Secret Archive), Remo Martini (University of Siena), Tommaso Miglietta (University of Trento), Giovanna Nicolaj (University "La Sapienza" of Rome), Franco Nugnes (Editor in chief of the magazine "Velocità"), Gherardo Ortalli (University "Ca' Foscari" of Venice), monsignor Romano Penna (Pontifical Lateran University), don Luca Pieralli (Pontifical Oriental Institute), monsignor Sergio Pagano (Prefect of the Vatican Secret Archive), Alessandro Pratesi (Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archival Studies), Delio Proverbio (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana), p. Émile Puech OFP (École Biblique de Jerusalem), monsignor Gianfranco Ravasi (prefect of the Pontifical Commission for Culture), Fr. Vincenzo Ruggieri SJ (Pontifical Oriental Institute), His Eminence Christoph Cardinal (Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna), Renata Segre Berengo (University "Ca' Foscari" of Venice), Francesco Tommasi (University of Perugia), Paolo Vian (Vatican Apostolic Library), Gian Maria Vian (editor in chief of Osservatore Romano).

To the late and much missed Marino Berengo, Marco Tangheroni and André Marion, who passed away before this text was completed, I send my lasting affection, and I miss you. I wished to consult many other authorities and was unable to do so for various practical reasons; I hope I shall be able to in the future.

My husband Marco Palmerini, who is remarkably well read in the sciences and knows the Shroud well, has given an impressive contribution to the quality of my research, passing it through the sieve of his meticulous criticism. My colleague Nadia Fracassi has also practically lived through the development of this book, and taken an active part. Exchanging views with them on many and various matters has allowed me to clarify my thoughts, and at least at the moral level I regard them as joint authors. Ugo Berti Arnoaldi, my trusted reference for the publishing industry, has given a decisive contribution to improving the quality of my writing from the narrative point of view: I could never give a precise account of the number of times he has read my work over and over again to help me turn my always over-erudite first drafts into a pleasantly readable essay.

I dedicate this book to my friend Claudio Cetorelli, a brilliant young Roman

antiquarian. In the summer of 2000, during a seaside holiday, he threw himself into the water and managed to save a drowning man, but his heart could not stand the strain. Those who tried to help him say that his last, feeble expression was a smile.

The mysterious idol of the Templars

Fascination of a myth

It was coming up to Christmas 1806. The French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was camped with his army near the Polish castle of Pultusk, on the shores of the river Narew, some 70 kilometres north of Warsaw.

He was at the height of his power: one year earlier, his great victory at Austerlitz and the following treaty of Pressburg, had allowed him to extend his control to almost cover the whole of Europe.

That August, the Confederation of the Rhine had decreed at a gathering in Regensburg, the entrance of the various German states into the French political orbit, putting an end to the thousand-year history of the Holy Roman Empire.

Again, on 14 October, he had inflicted a morally and materially shattering defeat on the Prussian army in the neighbourhood of a town called Jena; now he was preparing to meet the Russian troops, who had enlisted to stop his worrisome advance into Polish land. They too, were to suffer a mighty defeat, just like Pultusk, on St. Stephen's day (Boxing Day). But at this moment the situation was still serious, the French troops were frightened by the cold and lack of supplies; and yet the Emperor was taking a bit of time to deal with a matter that clearly concerned him.

The Emperor kept thinking of a tragedy titled *Les Templiers*, written by a fellow Frenchman called François Raynouard, a lawyer of Provençal origin with a passion for history. The play covered the grim events of the trial ordered by the King of France, Philip IV the Fair, against the most powerful monastic and military order of the Middle Ages, the "Poor fellow-soldiers of Christ", better known as the Templars. The tragedy described the unjust destruction of this order of knight-monks, who were also clever diplomats and expert bankers, and in Raynouard's view, the innocent victims of the French King, who had treacherously assaulted them to make himself master of their wealth. The Emperor had not liked the play: first, because Napoleon, having crowned himself Emperor in Notre Dame Cathedral on 2 December 1804 in the presence of Pope Pius VII, saw himself as the moral heir of the charisma of the French

sovereigns of the Dark and Middle Ages, along with the consecrated oil which, according to legend, had been miraculously brought down from Heaven by a white dove during the baptism of King Clovis. Napoleon found the cynical and cruel depiction of Philip the Fair really out of place. Above all, though, Raynouard had mercilessly disappointed the solid beliefs felt by a whole culture – of which Napoleon himself was an illustrious representative – about that celebrated order of monks who carried swords, so suddenly fallen from the height of power, wealth and prestige into ruin and the disgraceful charge of heresy. It was an adventurous story, full of mysteries and hints of dark things, and it was magnetically attractive to the rising romantic taste, glad to colour everything with touches of the irrational. The Emperor was a pragmatic spirit, and his interest in the affair was wholly different, however. The doom of the Templars had been, in its time, the herald of a clear political plan. And paradoxically it went on being so, although the issue was five centuries old.[1]

That fanciful, nostalgic way of looking at the ancient military order had appeared in Europe in the early years of the 18th century, born of the encounter of a genuine desire to renew society with a not wholly objective reading of history. By the end of the 1600s all Western countries had a bourgeoisie that had grown rich on trade and the beginnings of industrial production, amassed genuine fortunes, and had their children given the best of education side by side with the children of the most ancient nobility. Wealthy and highly prepared, the members of this emergent social group felt ready to take part in the governance of the country, but rarely achieved it, because society was still structured in the ancient fashion, in a stiff and closed system that concentrated political power in the hands of the aristocracy. The heirs of fortunes built on degrading, plebeian "trade" could only hope to enter the elite by marrying the daughter of some illustrious and recently ruined house, ready to let its blue blood be diluted with fluids of humbler origin. After the wedding, the bridegroom would start living as his new friends and relatives did, and was absorbed into the system. The renewal of thought caused by the Enlightenment led this new emerging class to look for an independent way to gain power, a way that allowed them to work effectively to grow their societies and make them fairer. People looked back admiringly to the past of certain European regions such as Flanders, Germany, the French area, or England, where powerful corporations of merchants and artisans had been able to form and, through group solidarity, defend themselves against the arrogance of aristocrats. The corporations of builders who had raised great Gothic cathedrals such as Chartres, in particular, were suspected of owning scientific knowledge in advance of their age, and to have handed them down through the centuries under the most jealous secrecy. Legitimate historical

curiosity mixed with the need to find illustrious origins, and in the early 18th century this brought about the formation of actual clubs, motivated by Enlightenment ideals yet certain that they were carrying on a hidden tradition of secret societies going all the back way to Biblical antiquity. Their name was taken from that of ancient guilds of master builders, in French *maçonnerie* – freemasonry. Eighteenth century society still had a passion for the concept of nobility, especially of ancient origins, as when in the midst of the Dark Ages the ancestors of the great dynasties had performed the deeds that would build a future of renown and privilege for their descendants. An immense fascination was attached to ancient orders of chivalry; even though the image was imprecise, they were seen as a kind of privileged channel, a fast track to the heights of society for persons of natural talent unlucky enough to be born outside the aristocratic caste. And the Templar order, the most famous and debated of them all, seemed to lie exactly where all these interests converged.

From legend to politics

Maybe the scientific knowledge that had allowed the great cathedrals to be built was the same with which the legendary Phoenician architect Hiram had constructed in Jerusalem the most celebrated building in all of history, the Temple of Solomon. The temple was not only a colossal piece of architecture, it was the holy place built to contain the Arcane Presence, the Living God, and as such was not supposed to be touched except by the hands of those initiated into the highest mysteries. It was imagined that Hiram's ancient teachings had reached the European Middle Ages at a particular time, when the westerners had reached Jerusalem with the First Crusade (1095-1099), establishing a Christian kingdom in the Holy Land. And the history of the Middle Ages and of the crusades in the Holy Land featured a particular presence that had even drawn its name from that of Solomon's Temple: the Militia Salomonica Templi, better known as the Order of Templars. Founded in Jerusalem, immediately after the First Crusade, to defend pilgrims to the Holy Land, the Templars had experienced a practically unstoppable growth, that had made it, barely 50 years after its foundation, the most powerful military religious order in the Middle Ages; until it had been overwhelmed, about two centuries later, by a mysterious and grim affair of heresy and dark magic that had ended with the death by burning of its last Grand Master.[2]

Celebrated intellectuals of the time, such as Dante Alighieri, had accused the

Templar trial, without mincing their words, of being essentially a monumental frame-up ordered by the French King Philip IV the Fair who wished to take over the order's patrimony, most of which lay in French territory. But already in the 16th century, some lovers of magic such as the philosopher Cornelius Agrippa had raised the possibility that the order might practice strange and hidden rites, rites celebrated by the dim light of candles, where mysterious idols and even black cats would appear.[3]

There was no clear idea of what role the Pope, then the Gascon Clemens V (1305-1314) had played in the affair. This man seemed ever hesitant, ever supine before royal will; and yet he had dragged on the trial of the Templars over no less than seven years, practically until his death, which took place only a month after that of the last Templar Grand Master. Many sources now readily accessible were then unknown, but even those that were known were studied with methods wholly different from today's.

History was treated as a literary endeavour, or a pastime meant to entertain and to enlighten the spirit. Therefore facts were selected from the past according to whether any moral teaching could be got from them, or whether they could stimulate the imagination like an adventure novel.

What was known of this Pontiff, whose lay name was Bertrand de Got, was that he had been born in France, that he had started the Papal exile in Avignon and that he had released Guillaume de Nogaret – the true "evil spirit" of Philip's reign, whom the King used for his most shameless actions - from excommunication. The King of France had been victorious in every confrontation with papal authority and even in the matter of the Templars' trial, many facts seemed to indicate that the Church had easily bent to the sovereign demands. But there was another fact that made minds lean towards this idea, a fact that had nothing to do with historical studies proper, but could have a major effect. The Church's attitude in the early 1700s was hugely cautious towards the aggressively rising new Enlightenment ideas; ideas that intended to promote a renewal of thought and of many social dynamics. At the root of this rejection lay several factors. Many of the high prelates who had leading roles in the hierarchy came from the same noble houses that managed secular power, and had a similar mentality and the same way of looking at the world. The Church had always been exempt from the social conditions that dominated the centuries, in the sense that it was possible to reach the height of spiritual and temporal power with one's own natural qualities, however humble one's origins. Many of the most famous Popes were from decidedly poor families; we just have to think of the legendary Gregory VII, who as a child had had to work as a porter, or the recent John XXIII, who came from a large peasant family who were not always certain

where the next meal would come from. This, at least, was the theory, since in fact things were often very different: the immense patrimonies connected with so many church positions made them very desirable prey for the nobility, who, by placing their younger sons within the hierarchy, could insure a privileged life for them without making a dent in the family capital. The highest point of corruption in this sense had taken place in the Renaissance, when it had become the practice to actually sell the most important posts, such as bishoprics, the richest abbotships and the title of Cardinal.[4]

The scandals, and the impossibility of swiftly reforming such customs, had raised political as well as religious protests, and had resulted in the Protestant schism. At the beginning of the 1700s, no less than two centuries after Luther's protest, the violent polemics raised by Protestant thought in the 1500s and 1600s had hardly died down. The Papacy was accused of having trapped mankind in a network of inventions set up for its own advantage, built upon the only real weave of Christian doctrine – the primitive Church. A school of historical studies had been set up in Magdeburg in Germany for the purpose of showing up the whole endless queue of falsehoods that were believed to have been piled up by the Catholic Church over 1,000 years for the sole purpose of bending the faithful to its own material interests. Its members, called the Centuriators of Magdeburg from the name of their published works (The Centuries) had indubitable intellectual qualities, and even if they had stuffed their writings with considerable amounts of imagination, they gave plenty of trouble to generations of Catholic scholars.[5]

In short, the wounds opened by Luther's mighty schism were far from closed, and any innovation that seemed to place the well-established and reassuring Catholic tradition of thought in any doubt seemed the flag of yet another onslaught. Galilei had been among the most illustrious victims of this reaction. The tendency quickly established itself to see the Church as an ally of that oppressive secular power that needed to be overthrown, and several Freemason groups took a strongly anti-clerical tinge that they had not had at their start. From the idea that reason was the favoured, if not the only way to improve human life, there developed progressively a near-divine concept of intellect itself: reason as the spark of divinity entrusted to man by God. God himself was pure reason, praised as the Grand Architect who had built the universe. The mysteries whereby the highest builder had raised the cosmos called back to mind those by which another architect of legend, Hiram of Phoenicia, had built the Temple in the Holy City Jerusalem. Solomon, to whom divine wisdom had granted measureless wealth, had raised the temple, and the temple brought back to mind the Templars, also destroyed because they owned

fabulous wealth, and possibly – everything seemed to prove it – possessors of Hiram's secrets. That same Catholic Church that seemed then to be in the way of any progress however small was nothing else but the heir of the mediaeval Papacy; an institution that had covered up for centuries the fragile bases of its historical claims by unleashing its most terrible weapon, the Inquisition, against those who held the proofs that could unmask it.

All these diverse ideas, born independently of each other but within the same context, ended up merging, and their outlines adapted till they fitted each other like the pieces of a complicated picture puzzle. From simple victims of raison *d'etat* and of Clemens V's political weakness, the Templars became bit by bit the unlucky heroes of a wisdom many thousands of years old, older and higher than Christianity, that could have spread progress and social welfare, but had been sacrificed to destroy the unjust privileges of an institution everlastingly allied with absolute power and its manifold abuses. Templarism, that is a highlycoloured, romantic view of the old order, projected in the social reality of the 1700s, became so compulsively fascinating a phenomenon as to take a protagonist's role in the history of European popular culture; but there were serious differences in the shape taken by the phenomenon in different countries. If in France the Templars appeared as champions of free thought against the oppression of the twin dinosaurs of the ancient regime – Crown and Church – in Germany to the contrary studies on the Templars were promoted exactly to strike at those very radical and subversive groups whom they inspired.

Prince von Metternich, the leader of the reaction against the upsets caused by Napoleon all over Europe, had started a cultural policy intended to destroy the credibility of the contemporary Freemason and neo-Templar groups. The intention was to prove that those heroic brethren of a secret order from which the French and the Revolution were proud to be derived, were in fact nothing but a bunch of heretics and perverts, the enemies of God, of the Church, of the State.

From champions of free thought and guardians of sublime knowledge as they had been in France and England, the Templars became in Austria the stronghold of the most unyielding heresy. Napoleon probably was aware of this political exploitation of the legend, and if he was, that must have increased his interest. [6]

About the Baphomet, and other demons

In the same year as the French Emperor was to write his review of François Raynouard's none too brilliant tragedy on the Templars, the London publishers

Bulmer & Cleveland published a book by Joseph Hammer (later Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall), called Ancient alphabets and Hieroglyphic characters explained, with an account of the Egyptian priests. The author was a young Austrian scholar from the town of Graz in Steyermark, who had joined the diplomatic service in 1796 and three years later had become a member of an embassy to Constantinople. He was later to take part in several British expeditions against Napoleon in the Middle East, meanwhile studying the ancient civilizations and travelling widely. This intense research, and the remarkable openness of his mind, would lead him to become over the next 50 years one of the greatest oriental scholars of his time, author among other things of a textbook on the history of the Ottoman Empire which is recognised as the first significant treatment of a previously unexplored field. In 1847-1849 he was to crown his career by becoming chairman of the immensely prestigious Austrian Academy of Sciences, which was to count among its members such figures as Christian Doppler and Konrad Lorenz.[7] What he had printed in 1806 were his first experiences of research; and, possibly to support the wishes of his mighty patron Metternich, and surely under the influence of the "black legend" of the Templars in his time, he placed in this review of ancient scripts a hypothesis born from mere similarity in sound, which would however rouse great shock and interest. Hammer-Purgstall had in fact identified a word written in hieroglyphics, which in his reading sounded like Bahúmíd, and which, if translated into Arabic, meant "calf".

Today we can reconstruct his work's development, and these scholar's oddities acquire a logical explanation. We do in fact find that some witnesses, not members of the Order, who testified in the trial of the Templars in England, had mentioned strange rumours according to which the Templars kept an idol in the shape of a calf. Furthermore, some testimonies in the trial carried out in southern France featured that strange name, Baphomet, which made such an impression on Hammer-Purgstall, because it seemed to approximate his mysterious word. These few witnesses of obscure notions are at most ten or so, and are really a droplet in the over one thousand testimonies (affidavits) still preserved today from the Templar trials, in most of which neither fiends nor calves appear. But the 19th century scholar, drawn by the romantic taste of his time and by a really quite unscientific research method, fell victim in good faith to the magnetic fascination of an idea: he paid no attention to proportion, only saw the tiny amount of descriptions with their disquieting details, and forgot a whole world of much more reliable and rational confessions. And, to the pleasure of Prince von Metternich, he designed for the Templars an exoteric and decidedly grim aspect.[8]

The pieces of the mosaic struck him as fitting each other perfectly, and the pull of the idea drove him further into his investigations. But it was only in 1818, after Waterloo and Napoleon's exile in St. Helena, after the Congress of Vienna and the dawn of Restauration, that Hammer-Purgstall's theories started taking a mature shape; and they did so by heftily drawing from other sources. In that year he published the work fated to achieve the highest fame in this area, whose eloquent title was Mysterium Baphometis Revelatum - The Mystery of Baphomet; Revealed. The author gave up his former belief that the Templar idol's strange name came from an ancient hieroglyphic term, and embraced a more complex theory: the word was no longer from the Egyptian language, but was a compound of two Greek terms joined to mean a "baptism of the spirit". He claimed that it proved that the Templars had inherited from antiquity, through the Cathar heretics of south France, the doctrines of the ancient Ophite sect. The latter took their name from the special cult they offered to the snake (Greek Ophis) from the Biblical book of Genesis. To them, the God of the Bible was not the principle of good but of evil, who out of petty jealousy had kept man in a condition of ignorance; and it had been the snake who was not the enemy, but the friend of humankind, to reveal the path of truth, that is, to gnosis (Greek for "knowledge"), divine knowledge.[9]

This was the primeval religion, the most ancient one known; it always survived in the shadows with its secrets, escaping down the millennia the persecutions of the Church and of the various powers that relied on it. One of the worst charges the King of France had thrown against the Templars was that they forced their novices to deny Jesus and spit on the Cross; this could be matched with an information from Origen (who had lived in the early 3rd century AD) that the Ophites forced their new members to blaspheme Jesus.

Shortly after the publication of Hammer-Purgstall's theories, it happened that the Duke of Blacas, a famous collector of exoteric-type objects, found as if by magic two extremely strange little caskets supposedly dated to the Middle Ages and representing some sort of devil-cult. The Baphomet received at that point the public consecration and the henceforth famous shape that none of the Templar sources, rare and mutually contradictory as they were, ever could grant. It was depicted as a kind of devil with the horns and legs of a ram, the breasts of a woman and the genitals of a man. [10] The brilliant and dishonest occultist Eliphas Levi rediscovered these fascinating fakes in the late 1800s, finding material in them that was most useful to his speculations; and he dressed the ill-defined Baphomet in that threatening devilish majesty in which he towers to this day in so many fantasy pictures. Fans of the occult are free to believe what they wish, but historical evidence leaves no reasonable doubt but that Baphomet is

nothing but an ugly doll invented – neither more nor less – by romantic fantasy, and still in use to this day to profitably catch the simple.[11]

The truth about the "Mysterious idol of the Templars" must be sought in a wholly different direction.

Paper secrets

Although his writings sounded like genuine revelations at the time, Hammer-Purgstall had invented very little, and the bulk of his content was anything but of his own making. The idea that the Templars were the secret guardians of a most ancient religious wisdom had already been proposed some 20 years earlier, in a less extensive form, by the German book dealer Christian Friedrich Nicolai. Nicolai owned a tavern in Berlin that was a favourite meeting place for intellectuals. Among them, a personal friend of Nicolai's called Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, possibly the most outstanding personality in German Enlightenment. [12]

In 1778, Lessing had written a genuinely explosive book. It was a part of a much larger text written years earlier by Samuel Reimarus, professor of Oriental languages, and bore the provocative title: An Apology for the Rational Worshippers of God. Its original author had kept it secret; now Lessing published it posthumously with the more reassuring title: The Goals of Jesus and His Disciples - another fragment from the Anonymous of Wolfenbüttel. Reimarus argued that Jesus had nothing divine about him; his activity would have been simply that of a political Messiah, a kind of patriot leader who wanted to free the Jews from Roman rule. When he died, his disciples refused to accept the facts and decided to steal the body, and went on to invent the news that he had risen, eventually founding a new religion. Samuel Reimarus was the first member of Western Christian culture to separate Jesus from the Christ, terms that had for so many centuries meant one and the same thing. That moment marks the start of the "quest for the historical Jesus", a new direction in research, intended to reconstruct the historical visage of Jesus beyond what was held to have been invented by the Catholic Church with its dogmas; while before then there had only been a Christology, that is the study of the life of Jesus in the light of theology and the Gospels.[13] Both Lessing and Nicolai inclined to what used to be called "rational Christianity", something very close to Deist philosophy, which substantially denied the divinity of the Christ to assert the existence of a single and sole creator God, the rational principle of absolute goodness and the

origin of all things. Some radical circles reached the conviction that Church and Papacy had stubbornly and dishonestly hidden a frightening truth for no better reason than to ennoble their historically dubious origins, placing them within God himself. And the strongly reactionary attitude of some Catholic areas, clinging to total denial, strengthened their opponents' belief that they had something to hide.

By 1810, Napoleon had become the master of most of Europe, and he decreed that all the documents of conquered kingdoms, including the States of the Church, were to be taken to Paris to become part of the vast Central Archive of the Empire. So it was that the colossal bulk of papers accumulated by the Popes were packaged up and set into motion towards France. Thanks to the esoteric tradition that had been growing, the arrival of the documents concerned with the trial of the Templars was surrounded by great expectations and even by a morbid kind of curiosity: those papers, kept safe for so long within the mighty walls of the Vatican, would certainly have revealed disconcerting facts. It was widely and largely correctly believed that the papal archive had always been Secretum, that is reserved to the Roman curia, and that no outsider would ever have been allowed a view of them. A kind of frenzy arose among the French officials charged with the expedition; it seemed clear that the truth about that obscure and complicated affair would have appeared, whole and inviolate, to the first man who could lay his hands on the minutes of the trial. Monsignor Marino Marini, personal manservant of the prefect of the Vatican Archives, had plenty of trouble with certain generals who insisted on opening particular crates of documents even before the convoy left Rome; and while the pragmatic Miollis was looking for the Bull of Excommunication against Napoleon, intending to quietly get rid of a most uncomfortable fact, Baron Étienne Radet was poking around elsewhere, eager to lay his hands on the trial of the Templars.

Even after the fall of Napoleon and the restoration of the monarchy, when the papal archive was allowed to return home, Monsignor Marini was still fighting to prevent the new government from "carelessly" keeping a number of documents of the highest historical interest, including the Inquisition's trial of Galileo Galilei and the trial of the Templar Order. He only got them back by a crafty suggestion: he saw fit to point out to the new government that the actions of Philip the Fair threw a decidedly nasty light on that very image of French monarchy that they intended to rehabilitate. It was therefore rather better, ultimately, that they should go back to the Vatican Archives, which were then closed to the public. [14]

The Duc de Richelieu felt it wiser to yield to the Holy See's complaints, as well as to Monsignor Marini's witty arguments; but he looked surely on with

great regret as the documents of the Templar trial, which Raynouard had meanwhile studied without finding the hidden truths, left Paris to return at last to the safe recesses of the Vatican, where the mysteries of Baphomet and many other demons would have been hidden away for heaven knew how many more centuries. And yet what really happened was that on 10 December 1879, the brand new register of requests to consult the Vatican Secret Archive recorded its first request. Over the course of the centuries, many people had been given special permission to visit the great palace where the documents of the Popes' thousands of years of history were kept; but only then were scholars first allowed regular and continuous access to the precious papers.[15] From the middle of the 19th century, historical studies had made a quantum leap, because the general trend of thought, thanks in part to the rising tide of Positivism, had lost the taste for irrationalism that had fascinated early Romanticism, in favour of a much more realistic approach. Palaeography and diplomatics - the disciplines that teach to decipher the complex writings of the past and to reliably distinguish genuine from false documents – had been taking giant strides. This was the start of a brilliant cultural period, which witnessed the systematic publication of many mediaeval sources, no longer by private and sometimes amateurish learned gentlemen, but by professional historians who produced systematic collections valid to this day, such as for instance the German-area Monumenta Germaniae Historica, which among other things, contains many edicts of Charlemagne and an enormous number of immensely important texts from the Holy Roman Empire.

Between 1841 and 1851, the French historian Jules Michelet published, in an equally authoritative and prestigious series – Collection des Documents inédits sur l'Histoire de France - the contents of an ancient register from the reign of Philip the Fair, which was then preserved in the Royal Library of Paris, and some other similar documents; it was an excellent edition for its time, which finally gave a scholarly picture of some of the most important documents of the trial against the Templars. The Michelet edition is still in use, although it is not widely known that its main item, the minutes of the long trial that took place in Paris between 1309 and 1312, comes from a copy that the King had made for his own Chancellery, while the original, which had been sent to the Pope, is in the Vatican Archives and still unpublished. The documents show no trace of Baphomet, of the magic Gnostic caskets, and of the other dark mysteries that people connected with the Templars; nor would a character like Michelet's, or the earnest spirit of the historical collection, have allowed such fantasies. Even popular contemporary culture had noticeably matured, so that themes that had been so fashionable 20 years earlier may no longer have interested people; and it was exactly thanks to that improvement in historical method that Pope Leo had made the anything but easy decision to open the gates of the Secret Archives.

The sudden death on 10 June 1879 of Monsignor Rosi Bernardini, prefect of the Archive, had led to the choice of a successor who was not only a scholar but a major figure in contemporary Germany culture, Cardinal Josef Hergenröther; years later, Ludwig von Pastor, a famous historian specialising in the Papacy, was to call this nomination the dawn of a new age for studies on Catholicism and on Western civilisation.[16] As soon as the Archives were opened, the Austrian historian Konrad Schottmüller, a fellow-countryman of Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, started a work of several years' duration, using modern historical methods to find and publish what he thought were the main records of the trial against the Templars. His work was carried on in the early 1900s by Heinrich Finke, and their overall result was the most complete and reliable edition of Vatican sources on the trial available to this day. Large-scale study of the documents relating to the Templars' trial surely turned out to be a severe disappointment to many, when the first scholarly editions started placing in the public domain the contents of those ancient parchments once kept in the fortress of Castel Sant'Angelo: no trace could be found of the sensational revelations expected by some, but on the other hand, many truths thus far unknown came to light, making it at last possible to write the history of the trial with accurate and modern criteria.

In 1978, Cambridge University Press published *The Trial of the Templars* by Malcolm Barber, which was to be the start of a new and very fertile season in this field of mediaeval studies. For the first time it was possible to follow the process of the trial as a whole, thanks to the authentic documents. A few years later, in 1985, the Sorbonne historian Alain Demurger published another fundamental text, titled *Vie et mort de l'Ordre du Temple*, which picked up the thread from Barber and developed further aspects with the same scholarly rigour.

When the historian Peter Partner published *The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and Their Myth* with the Oxford University Press, the world's scholars were also given a clear account of how many exoteric legends about the Templars had enchanted and animated intellectual and political groups for two centuries; sometimes by culture-driven suggestions, sometimes by downright conscious invention. The original documents, properly read and inspected, left no more space to those magic-tinged chivalric fancies that past writers had indulged, trying to interpret the history of the Templars in the light of caskets, hieroglyphic writings, or dubious texts written at least 300 years after the end of the Order.

These three monuments of historical method and research would not allow the

collective view of this ancient, notorious order of knights to stay the same. There was now certain evidence that the trial had been nothing but a colossal, tragic conspiracy with political reasons and strong economic interests, though several points were still obscure; and that was pretty much the opinion clearly stated by a number of illustrious contemporaries, such as Dante Alighieri, who saw one way or another, the unfolding of the trial and bore witness to their views. The great Tuscan poet makes the founder of the French Royal House, Hugh Capet, say in so many words that (among the many crimes of his descendants) Philip the Fair had destroyed the Templars for no other reason than greed. [17]

The brothers of the glorious Baussant

The order of the Temple was founded at the beginning of the 12th century. In the years that followed the First Crusade, a French knight called Hugues de Payns, lord of a fief near the city of Troyes and vassal of the Count of Champagne, had brought together a few comrades in the city of Jerusalem, just taken back by Christians, founding a brotherhood of lay soldiers who lived as *lay people* with the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre.

In 1119, a gang of Saracen robbers slaughtered a caravan of Christian pilgrims travelling to the Holy Places. The event had an enormous resonance; even in the distant lands of the West, Christian society wept over those unarmed, butchered travellers. The government of the Kingdom of Jerusalem were growing increasingly concerned over a problem that was to become chronic in the history of the Holy Land: the troops available were wholly inadequate to efficiently defend the country, so the population was under the constant threat of attack. It was maybe as a result of this tragedy that the following year, 1120, Hugues de Payns and his comrades committed themselves before the Patriarch of Jerusalem to fighting in defence of Christian pilgrims. Having given up voluntarily the prosperity of their noble estate, and having embraced poverty as a mark of conversion to atone for their sins, Hugues de Payns' *lay* knights had taken the name of "poor fellow-soldiers of Christ"; they lived on alms from the population, and wore clothes thrown away by others and, again, given to them as alms. [18]

A few years later, the group grew till they amounted to some thirty people. They were too many to remain with the Canons in the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, or it might be that the King of Jerusalem had felt the potential in the brotherhood and decided to take it under his wing; at any rate, the Poor Fellow-

Soldiers of Christ moved to a wing of the royal palace which the sovereign had earlier used as royal quarters.

The building stood near some ruins which were identified as the remains of the ancient Temple of Solomon; so people started calling them *Militia Salomonica Templi*, or even *Milites Templi*, and later, more commonly, Templars. [19]

Hugues de Payns and his companions had taken the three monastic vows of poverty, obedience and chastity before the Patriarch of Jerusalem; without being ordained priests, which would have been incompatible with the profession of arms which was at the heart of their mission, they were members of a kind of brotherhood in the service of the Holy Sepulchre, and had achieved a Church dignity comparable with that of the many lay-brother monks who, without becoming priests, lived out their lives of penance and prayer in the convents of the various religious orders. It may have been this special vocation of theirs which suggested to Baldwin II, King of Jerusalem, the next step: if the brotherhood had become a genuine order of the Church of Rome, with all the exemptions and privileges that went with that, the new body would have been free from possible external interests. It would have been a mighty resource for the defence of the Holy Land.

The project faced many difficulties. In the thousand-year history of Christianity, the profession of arms had never had a favourable press, and some of the ancient Fathers of the Church even regarded soldiering as an offence against God. To deal with the issue, the greatest mystic of the time, Bernard, the Abbot of Clairvaux, was called upon. Some scholars hold that he was related to the family of Hugues de Payns. The King of Jerusalem seems to have written a letter to him, asking him to patronise the new order's birth and work out a special religious rule in which service to God "should not be in contrast with the noise of war".[20]

In 1126 or 1127, Hugues de Payns left the East and travelled to Europe to canvass his project with the various feudal lords and find new followers. He also met the celebrated abbot, who had thus far proved deaf to his prayers; it may have been then, speaking in person with the head of the religious brotherhood, and hearing from his own lips of the difficulties faced by the Christians in Jerusalem, that Bernard reconsidered the King's proposal. He realised that the military activity of these monks, if restricted purely to the defence of pilgrims and of other defenceless Christians, could be seen as a good thing, and very useful for the kingdom in the Holy Land. From then on, the abbot threw the whole weight of his authority behind the establishment of the new order. Bernard explained his great enthusiasm for the new project in a treatise titled *De Laude*

Novae Militiae, in which the Templar Knight was celebrated as a warrior saing. He also brought in other religious celebrities of the time, such as the aged and venerated Stephen Harding, who had written rules for important monastic foundations; he gained the Papacy's support through the help of Aymeric of Burgundy, head of the Papal chancery and right-hand man of Pope Honorius II. Thanks to his precious patronage, in January 1129, during an ecumenical council held in Troyes, the Papal legate, Cardinal Matthew of Albano, granted pontifical approval to the new order of the Templar militia, and approved its rule in the Pope's name. A fine recent book by Simonetta Cerrini gives a clear account of the genuine spirit of the Templar rule, and the context of its approval. [21]

The brothers of the Temple lived in communities separate from the world, and divided their time between prayer and armed service in defence of the Christian population. They were divided in two main groups: the milites, those who had received the investiture as knights, who wore white clothes as a mark of purity and perfection, and the sergeants, who had to be satisfied with darker clothes and carried out essentially working tasks. Their popularity and protection from rulers made the order a mighty institution, and their power grew in time, thanks to the special immunities they received: in 1139, Pope Innocent II, a disciple of St. Bernard, granted the Templars a privilege titled Omne Datum Optimum, which lay the groundwork for the Order's independence from any lay or ecclesiastical authority. This was later strengthened by several successive concessions, which made the Templars a wholly autonomous body, subject only to the authority of the Pope.[22] In 1147, Pope Eugenius III decreed that the Templar habit was to carry a red cross as a distinctive sign, in memory of the blood that the warrior monks shed in defence of the faith.[23] To be brief, the new Order adopted the principle of ora et labora which regulated the life of all Benedictine monasteries, but in this case the manual labour carried out by the Temple monks took the form of military activity. Barely 30 years from its foundation, the Order had grown so swiftly that it was necessary to divide its establishments into a number of provinces, and its development continued throughout the twelfth century. By about 1200, the Temple was present in the whole Mediterranean basin, from northern Europe to Sicily, and from England to Armenia, with hundreds of properties including fortresses, commands and landed estates of various kinds. The provinces were under the control of a general overseer called the Visitor, who was charged – exactly – with visiting the various regions of the Templar world and refer back to the Grand Master and to the General Chapter of the order, who met once a year. By the end of the 1200s there actually were two Visitors, one for the East and the other for the West. [24] The Templars were admired for their reputation as heroes of the faith, envied for their riches and the

many privileges bestowed on the Order, and they also had a considerable religious charisma in contemporary society: their leaders were regarded as highly authoritative experts in recognising genuine relics, of which the order had a vast store. It is legitimate to wonder on what basis their contemporaries developed this view, or else how the Templars went about distinguishing the authenticity of such objects. They certainly were greatly helped by their profound knowledge of the eastern world, in which the Order had been born; but according to some sources, it seems that the Order's priests used relics of Jesus because their sacred power strengthened the force of prayer during exorcisms. [25]

The warriors of the Temple were subject to a strict military discipline that made them, when the time to fight came, a tight force with great capacity for coordination. Their military skills went with a great deal of *esprit de corps* which the rules tried to encourage in every way, and the obedience to a most rigid code of honour from which no deviation was allowed. Their flag was the glorious banner called the *Baussant* because it was half white, half black, the symbol of Templar pride and excellence. Together with the fighters of the other great military religious order, the *Hospitallers*, they were the backbone of the Christian armed forces in the Holy Land; but there was an important difference between the two orders. While the Temple was from the beginning an institution designed for the military defence of the Holy Land, the Hospital of St. John had been born as a brotherhood to care for sick pilgrims, and had only later become also a military order for the defence of the realm. [26]

Losing the Sepulchre, losing honour

In 1187 the Sultan of Egypt, Saladin, who had managed to unite Muslims into a single front against the crusader states, annihilated the Christian army at a place called the Horns of Hattin. All captured Templars and Hospitallers were slaughtered, several fortresses fell to the Muslims; Jerusalem was lost, and the Holy Sepulchre was lost to the Christians for good, save for a brief spell in the time of the Emperor Frederick II, who made a special agreement with the Sultan al-Kamil that seemed like treachery of a kind to many. [27] The loss of Jerusalem was a colossal injury to the Templar Order, born exactly to defend the Holy Land. Historians have abundantly documented its grave material losses; but there may yet be more to say about what we would call today the troops' morale. The Templars had an extremely close bond with the tomb of Christ; just in that

ultimately sacred place, the ideal and material centre of Hugues de Payns' first brotherhood had been born. Losing the Sepulchre meant losing their own honour. At the beginnings of the 13th century there was a great collective movement to restart the Crusade and recover the Holy City, and Pope Innocent III, who felt very strongly on this matter, tried to help the military orders, who were on their knees after Saladin's victory. Between 1199 and 1203, a new expedition to the East was set up, under the leadership of the city of Venice and of some great French barons; but once it had reached Constantinople, the crusader host took advantage of the grave political decline of the Byzantine Empire, whose immense wealth excited the crusaders' greed. Though excommunicated by Innocent III, what was to be the fourth crusade for the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre turned into an ugly bloodbath at the expense of fellow-Christians, even though their Church was supposed to have broken away from Rome with the schism of 1054. The Venetians, who had driven the shift of object from Jerusalem to the wealth of Byzantium, shared the immense loot of the city – incalculable amounts of precious metals, artworks, unique relics – with the French, and they also partitioned the territories of the former empire, creating a new Latin empire of the East. The event left a dark shadow over the image of crusading in general; it had become clear that some ideas no longer had the same hold over people's hearts, that political and economic interests stood now above everything else. From then on, Christian society started doubting whether it would ever be able to really retake the Holy Sepulchre. [28]

The Islamic re-conquest of the Holy Land went on apace throughout the 1200s, and the military orders were forced to become used to defeat after defeat. The Order of the Temple had to adapt itself to changing conditions changing, for its part, its functions; if it was no longer possible to focus on military service, since the Islamic front was too strong, it was possible to advance the financial activities that one day, when the time was right, could have served to reconquer Jerusalem. The Temple thus became a kind of bank in the service of the Crusade; Popes used it to keep and invest the alms collected for the Holy Land, and the order was also used as a treasury by Christian sovereigns. [29]

Between 1260 and 1270, the Sultan Baibars cut the Christian kingdom down to a thin strip of coast land headed by the town of Acre in Syria. Western society started feeling serious doubts about the utility of military orders; many wondered whether it was right to keep these gigantic enterprises, loaded with privileges, going, when all they seemed to do was taking one defeat after another and seemed wholly unable to recover the Holy Places. In 1291 Acre also was taken, in spite of a desperate resistance in which Templars proved heroic and the Grand Master Guillaume de Beaujeu died fighting to cover the retreat of others. The

last bulwark in the Holy Land was now gone, and the crusading age closed with defeat.[30] The event immediately had serious consequences for the military orders, who were forced to find other Eastern seats. Templars and Hospitallers moved to Cyprus, while the Teutonic Knights, an order founded in the middle of the 13th century, shifted their activities to the frontier of north-eastern Europe. [31]

The fall of Acre convinced Pope Nicholas IV that it was necessary to join Templars and Hospitallers into a new single order, larger and stronger, and finally able to recover the Holy Land. This project had already been mooted in the Council of Lyons, 1274, when it had also been suggested that the leadership of the new Order should be offered to one of the Christian sovereigns, possibly a widower or unmarried in order to respect the monastic nature of the institutions. Nothing had come of this initiative, because the Grand Masters of both Temple and Hospital had opposed it fiercely. In 1305 the new Pope Clemens V started the idea of fusion off again, and requested the heads of Temple and Hospital to offer a view on the matter and also to produce a plan for a new Crusade. Templar Grand Master Jacques de Molay declared firmly against it: if the two Orders had been united and placed under a European sovereign, the latter would have made the new Order a tool for his own political goals and forgotten all about Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

As for the new Crusader expedition, the Templar leader suggested to the Pope that its military leadership should not be entrusted to Philip the Fair, but rather to James II of Aragon. The Catalan sovereign could be very useful thanks to his powerful fleet, and besides – and this was very important – he was known to be very respectful of Apostolic authority and to have a mind in line with that of the Templars, who regarded the Pope as the order's lord and master. Philip the Fair, on the other hand, declared himself openly autonomous from Papal authority. Only a few years earlier, from 1294 to 1303, the King of France had been in open conflict with Pope Boniface VIII and had been excommunicated by him; the assault of Anagni, intended to arrest the Pope and take him prisoner beyond the Alps, had prevented the Bull of Excommunication from being published, but the King's position was still very dubious. There also was a fact that should not be neglected: Philip the Fair wanted to pass the Crusader troops through Armenia, with the intention of conquering that kingdom, which was Christian though not Catholic, and make it a French dependency. The Temple had a province of its own in Armenia, and the local leaders had informed the Templars that they would never have admitted French cavalry within their fortresses, for fear of being treacherously attacked. The memorial written by Jacques de Molay unmasked the French monarchy's true intentions in the Crusade to come, and no

doubt put a major spike in Philip the Fair's plans; the king and his advisers surely saw the Order as a serious obstacle in their international policy. Still in 1306, Philip the Fair found himself beset by popular revolt because of some financial manoeuvres of his which had unleashed horrendous inflation in the kingdom. The king badly needed good money to stop the hole, and in the Paris Temple Tower – a fortress of awe-inspiring size – vast liquid capitals were kept. That was when the plot against the Order was started. [32]

Early in 1307, Jacques de Molay sailed from Cyprus to the European mainland to meet with Clemens V, while the leader of the Hospitallers had put off the trip because he had been forced to take command of certain military operations involving his order. The Grand Master of the Temple would never come back to the East again; a few months later, the long trial was to start, whose notorious events may be summed up in a few essential phases.

Under a cloak of infamy

At dawn on 13 October 1307, the King of France's soldiers appeared in full battle dress at all Templar commands in the kingdom to arrest all the monks in residence; they immediately started questioning them, tortured a number of confessions out of them, and had them written up in official form so as to send them to the Pope as evidence. They were following, word by word, the warrant of arrest signed by Philip the Fair and secretly sent out on the previous 14 September. The King claimed to have acted after consultation with the Pope and on a direct request of the French Inquisition, because a strong suspicion of heresy had arisen over the order. He said:

They who are received within the Order ask thrice for bread and water; then the preceptor or master who receives them leads them secretly behind the altar or in the sacristy; then, still in secret, he shows them the cross and image of Our Lord Jesus Christ and orders them to thrice deny the Prophet, that is, Our Lord whose image is present, and to thrice spit on the Cross; then they are made to strip their clothes off, and he who receives them kisses them at the end of the spine, under the pants, then on the umbilicus, and finally on the mouth, and says that if any brother of the order wants to be joined with them carnally, they must not deny themselves, for under the statutes of the order they

are required to bear it. For this reason, many of them practice sodomy. And each of them wears over their shirt a thin strand of rope which he is always to bear, his whole life long; these strands have been touched and placed around an idol with the head of a man with a long beard, a head they kiss and worship in their provincial chapters: but this is not known to all the brothers, but only to the Grand Master and the elders. Furthermore, the priests of their order do not consecrate the Body of Our Lord; this will have to be investigated most especially when Templar priests will be questioned. [33]

With incredible speed for the time, the fruit of a detailed strategy worked out in advance over years, Philip the Fair's officials gathered hundreds of confessions across the kingdom, which were presented to Clemens V as evidence of heresy before the Curia had time to react. The lawmen of the Crown had meant this to tie the Pope's hands, leaving him little or no space for autonomous action: immediately after the arrests, Guillaume de Nogaret, the royal lawyer who had been sent to Anagni to arrest Boniface VIII, organised some popular assemblies in which the Templars' guilt was advertised as certain. Franciscan and Dominican friars were ordered to preach to the people of the Templars' heresy, so as to create a true prejudice among the commons.

Inquiries went on throughout France at a frantic pace till the start of the next year; in a short time, the dossier of accusations set up by the King's men of law swelled to monstrous proportions, and the charges already set out in the indictment of October 1307 were joined by new ones, formed from materials gathered here and there as pressure and torture produced their crop of confessions. It was an obscene crescendo, greedily fed by popular imagination that was to continue all the length of the trial like a river bursting its banks, dragging all kinds of detritus on its rabid way to the sea. It wasn't enough to have denied Christ and outraged the Cross: the charges against the Templars were eventually to grow from seven to more than seventy.[34]

Clemens V went from a state of utter confusion in the weeks that followed the arrests to a suspicion that the King was acting entirely in bad faith: a suspicion that turned into certainty when, towards the end of November 1307, two Cardinals sent to Paris to question the local Templar prisoners and so clarify the situation, came back to the Curia with the news that they had not been allowed to so much as see the prisoners. In December, a second delegation of the same

prelates reached Paris, this time with the power to excommunicate Philip the Fair if prevented again from meeting the prisoners. This allowed Jacques de Molay to denounce all the violence and grave irregularities he had suffered. The following February, the Pope suspended the whole French Inquisition for grave irregularities and abuses of power, which stopped the trial in its tracks. The whole spring that followed was spent in a heated diplomatic war between the King, who had taken over the Temple's goods and wanted the Order condemned, and the Pontiff, who refused to make any decision before he had personally examined the prisoners. Faced with Clemens V's obstinacy, the King understood he had no choice; so he allowed a minority of Templars, including the Grand Master and other high officials of the Order, to leave Paris under escort to reach the Roman Curia, then resident in Poitiers, and be questioned by the Pope. Between June 28 and July 2 of 1308, Clemens V was at last able to make his own investigation of the Templars; although the Pope was the only person on Earth who had the legal authority to investigate the order, paradoxically it was only then that he was able even to see the accused in person, after months in which the confessions that had been tortured out of them had been going openly all over Europe. The evidence was by now as polluted as it could possibly be, the Order's honour had been crushed under a colossal cloak of infamy.

After finding that the officers of the King of France had made extensive use of torture, Clemens V found that, beyond the falsehoods constructed by the royal lawmen, the Templars admitted that a tradition existed, handed down in strict secrecy, that obliged new members to deny Christ and to carry out some kind of outrage against the Cross (generally spitting). The brothers explained it by saying, modus est ordinis nostri, or "it's a habit of our order". The existence of this secret ceremonial, a kind of test of obedience placed at the end of the actual ceremony of admission, shifted the responsibility towards the order itself; it was clear that the fault could not be ascribed to the individual brothers, if they had been forced into those unworthy acts by their own seniors just to obey some Order custom. The Saracens used to torture Christian prisoners to compel them to reject Christianity, and as a tangible sign of apostasy, they required them to spit on the Crucifix: the Templars' odd ritual repeated this custom in a highly realistic theatrical manner, including threats, beatings and even isolation in a jail cell. Its purpose was to steel the new member's character through a traumatic experience, that is by putting him immediately in the presence of what he would suffer if he ever fell into enemy hands; it probably also served to inculcate that total obedience that the Order demanded, surrendering one's own freedom to hand himself over to the judgment of his superiors in a practically total subjection. The denial of Christ and the spit on the Cross had later been joined by elements of other origin, of the kind of senior-to-junior bullying and "initiations" well known in armed formations, gross and humiliating practical jokes performed by veterans on recruits: these included the three kisses (on the mouth, on the umbilicus and on the buttocks) and the warning not to deny oneself to brothers in search of homosexual sex. The invitation to sodomy was a simple verbal humiliation, never followed by concrete acts; only six Templars out of over 1,000 who confessed in the trial ever actually spoke of homosexual relations with fellow knights.[35]

A trial without a verdict

In the Pope's presence, the Templars had the opportunity to explain that the gestures of the admission ritual were nothing more than a stage performance that had nothing to do with intimate belief, a very unpleasant nuisance which had to be accepted because the Order required it. The fact that the denial happened under constriction excluded personal responsibility, and there could be no real guilt if the outrage against religion had not been done of one's own will. Clemens V became convinced that the Templars were not heretics, even though the Order could not be absolved because it had allowed a vulgar and violent military tradition, wholly unworthy of men under vows, to exist. His final judgment was severe, but not condemning; not heretical, but hardly without stain, the Templars had to offer solemn repentance, begging the Church's pardon for their faults; then they would have been absolved and taken back into the Catholic communion. Between 2 and 10 July 1308, the Pope heard out in person these requests for forgiveness and absolved the Templars as penitents; but an important part of the order had not been reached by his operation. The Grand Master and the Order's highest officers, who had left Paris with the rest of the convoy, had been kept by royal soldiers in the fortress of Chinon on the shores of the Loire, under the excuse that they were too ill to ride all the way to Poitiers. Clemens V immediately understood that the King intended to cut off at the neck the significance of the Papal investigation; for if the Pope had not been able to hear the leaders of the Temple, those who knew the whole truth, it was always possible to claim that his verdict was not complete or significant, since it had come from minor witnesses. After completing his investigation of the Templars who had reached him, Clemens V secretly sent to Chinon castle three cardinals, who heard out the Templar leaders from 17 to 20 August 1308, received their demand for forgiveness, and absolved them in the Pope's name. It was not what

we would call a quashing of the sentence, but a sacramental act which however had juridical features as well: the charge moved against the Templars had been for crimes against religion.[36]

Assaulted in his rights by the illegal arrest of the Templars, then once again deceived by the King's fraudulent effort to prevent him from meeting the heads of the Order, the Pope could consider the Chinon inquiry as a forceful moral victory; the only kind of victory, alas, open to him, given his extreme political weakness. No later than the following October, shortly after the events of Chinon became widely known, Philip the Fair's strategists set out on a long-prepared action that attacked directly the Church of Rome: the bishop Guichard di Troyes, who had earlier fallen into disgrace at the Court of France and had then been involved in a financial scandal, was charged with sorcery and burned alive on royal order, even though Clemens V himself had previously cleared him of the charges. This repeated the plot of a trial of a few years earlier, against the bishop of Pamiers Bernard Saisset, whom Philip the Fair had hounded on charges of lese-majesty and condemned to death against the will of the Pope.

This fact was connected with the trial against Boniface VIII and that against the Templars, amounting as a whole to a plan to destabilise: a bishop, a Pope and a whole religious order had fallen under accusation for terrible crimes such as heresy and sorcery, and this showed that the Church of Rome was riddled with corruption in every part of its body. Philip the Fair's lawmen were planning to dig up the body of Boniface VIII to subject it to a public trial, at whose end it was to be burned under the charge of heresy, sorcery and blasphemy. The dead pope's burning would have placed the whole Church in an illegal position: the whole reign of Boniface VIII would have been considered invalid, and everything that happened after the abdication of Celestine V, not excluding the election of Clemens V, would have proved null and void. With the College of Cardinals split and most French bishops loyal to Philip, the King threatened a schism that would separate the Church of France from that of Rome. Clemens V was faced with a dreadful dilemma: he had to choose whether to condemn the order of the Temple as the sovereign demanded, or save it and risk the burning of Boniface VIII's body and the French schism with all its consequences.[37]

The Pontiff chose to protect the unity of the institution for which he was responsible, sacrificing a part to preserve the whole. The Order of the Temple was by now effectively destroyed, blasted away by the wave of scandal and defamation. Many brothers had died in the King's jails, many more had lost their motivation for good. In the spring of 1312 an Ecumenical Council was gathered in Vienne to decide, among other things, the fate of the Templar order; the Pope did not conceal that the judgment was most controversial and a large part of the

council opposed their condemnation. After long thought, he felt there was only one way to solve the issue, avert irreparable scandal, and serve the interest of the Crusade: avoid a verdict and act instead by way of administrative decision; that is an official act required for practical reasons. Being a great expert in canon law, he sought for an expedient not to condemn the Order of the Temple, of whose innocence at least where the most serious charges were concerned he was certain: in the Bull *Vox in excelso*, the Pope declared that the Order could not be condemned for heresy, and was therefore "closed" by administrative fiat and without a verdict, to avoid grave danger to the Church. The goods of the Templars were handed over to the other great religious-military order, the Hospitallers; that at least made them safe from the greed of the French crown, and so they might possibly still serve the cause of retaking the Sepulchre and Jerusalem, the reason why so many people had in the past donated gifts to the Temple. Philip the Fair did not exactly accept that decision happily; in the end, however, the Hospitallers were able to have a consistent part of what had been the Temple's patrimony.[38]

Though unjust, the end of the Templar order was proving historically convenient: the scandal roused by the trial had to be placated, and the doubts created by the Templars' confessions needed to be silenced. The scandal had made the Order odious to sovereigns and to all Catholics; it would no longer be possible to find an honest man willing to become a Templar. The order had therefore lost its usefulness to the Crusader cause for which it had been established, and furthermore, if a swift decision on the issue had not been reached, the king would have completely squandered its goods. Clemens V therefore decided to get the Templar order "out of the way" by refusing to issue a final sentence, but forbade any further use of name, habit and distinctive signs of the Temple under the penalty of automatic excommunication for anyone who ever dared proclaim himself a Templar in future. The Pope thus eliminated the Order from contemporary reality, but by not issuing a formal sentence he left judgment on the Order in abeyance.

In the end, then, there was no conviction or convict, but a defendant severely punished for crimes other than those he had been indicted for. Something of the same kind also happened with the trial against the late Boniface VIII; which is hardly surprising, since the two issues were intimately bound up with each other, and their resolution was the result of a long diplomatic struggle made not just of negotiations but also of actual blackmail from both sides.

The fate of the leading Templars was still undecided, and they awaited the Pope's judgment, when, on 18 March 1314, after proclaiming the Order innocent, Grand Master Jacques de Molay and Preceptor of Normandy Geoffroy

de Charny were abducted by royal soldiers and condemned to be burned on a little island in the Seine without any reference to the Pontiff. Old, sick for years and severely tested by that long clash with the French monarchy, Clemens V was no longer in any condition to exert influence; he died about a month later, and his death marked the start of the Church of Rome's exile in Avignon. Later Popes, pressed by other emergencies, preferred not to deal with the odd situation of the Templar order, never condemned but practically shut down by virtue of a wholly exceptional decision.[39]

The mysterious presence

The most recent research into the documents of the Templar trial has allowed many points to be clarified. They proved among other things that the construct of Philip the Fair's indictment had an explosive impact because it was built on some foundation of fact; certain charges such as the denial of Christ, the obscene kisses and the spitting on the Cross came from a few actual facts, suitably distorted and reworked into evidence of heresy. A few years before he moved openly against the Temple, the King of France had secretly intruded into the Order some spies to collect any kind of information that might help damage it; then a group of royal men of law led by Guillaume de Nogaret had worked the information into a detailed and imposing castle of accusations. These clever technicians of the law started from a few basic points and derived facts from them just as is done in mathematical sciences when building a theorem. It's no exaggeration to say that Nogaret and Co. built the "theorem of Templar heresy". Their technique was that of the half-truth: every charge they wanted to prove must have a hook in a genuine fact, unpleasant or censurable, but committed without intention of sin; Templars would admit the fact itself under questioning - such as that they had been forced to deny Christ - but they would then deny the charge that hung from it, that is that they did not believe in Christ. But at that point, their position hardly looked solid.[40] The very same identical scheme was employed to argue that the Templars had turned their back on Christ en masse to indulge the worship of a mysterious idol.

The charge started with a material and evident fact. The Templars wore a little strand of linen string over their tunics. That was something nobody could deny, because everyone had seen it, indeed it was clearly mentioned in the part of Templar statutes dealing with the brothers' dress. The Templars knew that it had some kind of symbolic rather than practical value, since they were under

obligation never to take it off — even when they slept at night — but they did not have any clear idea what it was. Leaning on this unarguable fact of the little linen string, Nogaret and the King's other strategists would argue that that object had in fact a perverted meaning, and stated that it had been in contact with a devilish object, a dark and mysterious idol in the shape of the head of a man with a long beard. According to the charge, the Templars offered this idol special liturgies, reserved only for the highest dignitaries. These were solemn ceremonies during which it was worshipped, kissed and rubbed with the linen strands that would later be distributed to all brothers in the Order.

The linen belt was a most banal little object which could never in itself have been used to defame the Templars; but it was something that concerned the whole Order, all its members, one by one. The idol on the other hand was a wholly exclusive matter, that could only be used against the higher officials. Making the Templar linen strands be somehow "fouled" by contact with the dark idol, however, Nogaret threw the charge of idolatry on every single monk of the Temple, "contaminated" by the idol possibly without knowing it thanks exactly to that little belt he wore every day.

Of all the charges thrown at the Templars, idolatry is no doubt the darkest, and it is not at all strange that such a suggestion inspired so many novelists. Curiously, however, this charge was not Nogaret's Pièce de résistance in the trial, not his chief weapon, but a kind of little side corollary stuck on as a kind of tail to so many other charges: in his indictment, Philip the Fair made it quite clear that only a very few Templars knew of the idol. Why such a disagreement between potential effect and actual work? The answer is simple: the prosecution, who had built a theorem on solid bases from a decade's worth of reports from its moles, knew quite well that the three disgusting acts of the ritual of admission were common matters practised in every command of the Temple. Practically every Templar could be led by threats or other methods to admit facts that were part of the daily life of the Temple, facts which could be manipulated and distorted; but the existence of the idol, whatever it was, was an issue purely for the elite, and the hope of wringing any confession seemed very distant indeed. Rumours about that mysterious object were, to Nogaret, very attractive; they would have allowed him to create a theatrically effective comparison to shock the Pope: just as Moses came back to find, to his rage and grief, that the Jews had in his absence abandoned the cult of the sole God and had built themselves a golden calf, so Pope Clemens V was to have the evidence that the Templars, themselves monks in a religious order, secretly worshipped a strange idol that had fallen into their hands. There was however a severe problem: if only the leaders of the Temple knew of the idol, it could be expected that only a very few

confessions could be gathered.

What Philip the Fair wanted was the entire demolition of the Order, so he had to convince the Pope that the whole Templar body was poisoned by corruption and heresy; the condemnation of the leaders alone was no good to the King, they would have been removed and replaced, while a mass indictment of the whole Order would allow him to demand from the Pope its total extinction. A few confessions, however red-hot, were worth little to the prosecution: even if ten or 20 Templars could be found to admit that they practised sorcery and raised devils, that would have amounted to nothing, because the thing would have seemed a sin – if a dire and inexcusable one – that affected only the culprits. At that point the Inquisition would convict the individuals. Nogaret and Philip the Fair, however, needed large numbers, and had to find charges that, even if less serious, were so widespread in the Order as to let them say that one could hardly find one Templar innocent of them. The military ritual of admission suited this need exactly; the secret ceremony with its apparent outrages against Christian religion, was ideal. The ritual was known to be commonly practised, though in widely divergent forms, so nearly every member of the Order could admit that they had carried out at least some of those guilty acts, such as denying Christ or spitting on the Cross: and since judicial procedures at the time weren't too refined, the general confusion raised by the scandal could well be used to suggest that the whole order was affected by anti-Christianity. Emphasis on the idol in the prosecution's scheme would have been ill-advised, since it risked suggesting that the whole castle of charges was built on mere calumny. Like the smart lawyer he was, Nogaret preferred to bet on charges that the monks themselves were more likely to confirm, and reduced the matter of the idol to an obscure, if chilling, detail: so he made it clear in the indictment that the existence of this simulacrum was unknown to the vast majority of monks. As had been expected, the harvest of reports of idolatry was exceedingly small, scarce and mutually highly contradictory, though Philip the Fair's strategists did what they could to manipulate and paint them in the grimmest possible colours.

A mosaic of fragments

Examination of the documents leaves no doubts whatever. Only a small, tiny minority of the Templars who appeared in the trial were able to say anything at all on this phantom object. And even within this tiny minority, many mentioned it only because they had heard talk about it from others, that is, from no personal

knowledge at all. That is a pretty sad haul when compared to the near totality of testimonies that have nothing whatever to say about it. Out of 1,114 Templar testimonies recorded during the trial, only 130 include even a hint of the idol, and most of those do nothing but repeat what the prosecution said; clearly these are the miserable product of torture and other forms of violence. Only 52 statements give any information at all about the idol, that is, 4.6% of the total. On this at least Philip the Fair did not lie: very few Order members were aware of the matter, as against the immense majority who had no idea what so ever. We may take this as reliable, since the inquisitors and the royal lawmen were hardly short of means to persuade. These very few witnesses, utter exceptions to the rule, don't even describe the same object, giving in fact the most wildly different detail. I think that all this must have discouraged historians from looking with due scholarly care in this field: in effect, the great variety of images makes it all seem like a big hodgepodge of things said at random. So the whole area was condemned without distinction, as a set of tragic lies caused by torture.

Matters are further complicated by the fact that some monks gave more than one statement in the course of the trial, changing their stories from one inquiry to another for reasons that we can sometimes only guess at (torture, promised rewards, the desire to avenge some personal wrong, etc). A classic case is that of Brother Raoul de Gisy, preceptor of the command of Latigny and charged with exacting the king's taxes in the county of Champagne: this man went from a redhot first account of events, in which he claimed to have seen the idol no less than seven times and that it was the image of a devil, to a wholly different one where he had seen it only once, by chance, and had no idea what it really was. The explanation lies in the fact that Raoul de Gisy made his first confession on 9 November 1307 under pressure by Guillaume de Nogaret and the Inquisitor of France; an interrogation carried out immediately after the wave of illegal arrests, when the King needed most serious evidence against the Order, and fast, to justify before the Pope his violation of the rights of the Church; the second was released on 15 January 1312 in an inquiry carried out by a commission of bishops, when the Pope had already taken control of the trial and interrogations took place with greater guarantees.[41]

Historians may find themselves as disconcerted as archaeologists would when, on opening the site of an ancient garbage pit, they meet with thousands of tiny pieces of pottery, different in make, material and colour, each of which will have to be carefully identified and re-made. In spite of the difference between the disciplines, there is only one way to make order out of chaos and reach a sufficiently valid understanding: one has to work with minute patience, bringing all fragments of the same type together and at the same time discarding

extraneous material that does not help and that has found its way into the heap by chance.

Some certainties may be reached as soon as we start reading with care the circumstances in which individual question sessions with the Templars took place, and they greatly help to understand many things about the trial. We know, for instance, that in some cases Templars were questioned once; but the inquisitors were not being satisfied with their statements. Instead of taking the testimonies as they were, they had the brothers tortured, then gave them time to think it over, and finally staged a second question session: this time their confessions, full of detail that their tormentors found satisfactory, were accepted and taken down as evidence. We also know that the trial went through several phases, and that these phases were widely different both in the methods used by questioners, and in their good faith. Therefore the statements sought by the questioners also changed widely according to date and place; he who asks the question is very able to influence the answer. [42]

The issue of the idol is one of the most complex, since it was a charge that lent itself more than any other to becoming coloured by fantasy, in part because of the violence in questioning the Templars, and in part because of the power of psychological suggestion – a mighty power and never to be underestimated – that rose everywhere in the dark climate of the scandal. Once we get over the first, disconcerting impact, it becomes clear that behind all the descriptions of the idol there are only five kinds of object that appear over and over again, if maybe with varying details. Three of these were cult objects, that is things basically not different from many others that mediaeval faithful saw every day in their churches: a reliquary-sculpture showing head, neck, upper chest and shoulders, a painting on wood, and finally the portrait of a man with a rather strange and ill-defined frame. No doubt, if such portraits were worshipped in secret, that made it the more urgent for investigators to know who was the man they represented, but the presence alone of such objects in Templar churches was not enough to support a charge of heresy. On the other hand, the other two objects lent themselves to it wonderfully, for they were things that could make an enormous impression in the mind of mediaeval men: had the prosecution only been able to find any such thing in a Templar command and take it to the Pope, that might have been enough to get a swift condemnation of the entire Order. The first of these supposed "idols" that the questioners tried to make the captive monks describe was a portrait of Mohammed, presented as evidence that the Templars had betrayed the Christian faith and gone secretly over to Islam. The second was some kind of monstrous or even devilish image, useful to prove that the Templars had been practising sorcery.

Portraits of Islam

The identification of the idol with a portrait sacred to Islam is found in six testimonies, but it cannot be called certain or identical in all cases. Brother Sergeant Guillaume Collier from Buis-les-Baronnies said explicitly that the brothers called the strange head Magometum, while two monks questioned in Florence and in Clermont said they had seen an idol called, respectively, Maguineth and Mandaguorra; in the inquiry that took place in Carcassonne, the monks Gaucerand de Montpézat and Raymond Rubei stated that it was made in figura baffometi, and the latter specified that he was addressed by an Arabic word, Yalla.[43] In the inquest carried out in Tuscia, near Rome, the sergeant Gualtiero di Giovanni from Naples said that during his ceremony of admission to the Temple there had been a real theological discussion to deny the dogmas of Christianity, and the idol, a figure of Allah, was at the centre of the debate: he said that brother Alberto made him deny Christ and told him that he should not believe in him. Brother Gualtiero then asked: "And in whom should I believe then?" The same brother Alberto answered: "In that great and single God that the Saracens worship".

He then added that it was wrong to believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, because they amounted to no less than three different gods, and he ended by stating that the Grand Master of the Temple and the preceptors in charge of a province had an image which represented that same God, worshipped him as creator, and exhibited his portrait in general chapters and in the most important assemblies. This testimony may perhaps be connected with that of Pierre Segron, who was told by the preceptor that he should not believe in Jesus Christ, but only in the Almighty Father: this confession, however, contains no reference to Islam. [44]

On the name of this supposed portrait, there is one clear testimony that calls it *Magometum*, a form very close to the genuine pronunciation; according to two brothers in Carcassonne it was called *baffometum*, a form that comes from the first but is distorted on account of the passage from Arabic to French. It is this form that has given rise to the fanciful etymologies once proposed by Hammer-Purgstall and accepted today only by readers of fantasy fiction. The other two variants, *Maguineth* and *Mandaguorra*, are also deformations of the original word, while the strange invocation to the idol supplied by another Templar, *Yalla*, seeks to replicate the Arabic form *Allah* with a strong initial; aspirations

which the notary who had to write the minutes in Latin rendered with the letter Y. But is it conceivable that the Templars, maybe even a small part of them, had become Muslims? Their strange secret admission-ritual practised after the licit ceremony did indeed have a direct relationship with the Muslim world: in the East it was known that Saracens forced Christian prisoners to deny Jesus Christ and to spit on the Cross, on pain of death if they refused. This is described in the chronicle of the Franciscan Fidenzio da Padova, and the ritual of obedience invented by the Templars to test their recruits repeated these gestures in a kind of theatrical performance. The King of France's lawyers had found out about it after years of secret investigations: to manage to confirm that the Templars had gone over to Islam *en masse* would have been vitally important to get the condemnation they were seeking, even better if they could have proved that the mysterious idols on which the King had gathered a few scraps of information was in fact Mohammed.

Two facts prove that this charge was utterly false: incoherent elements, incompatible with each other, yet liable to be brought together somehow by a 14th century European mind. To begin with, it is well known that the Islamic religion utterly forbids images of the Prophet, and all images of Mohammed are actually figures of his body with his face hidden by holy fire. The "idol" ascribed to the Templars, however, was clearly the portrait of a normal human being with a bearded face; that cannot in any way be considered an image of Mohammed. The same is true of the testimony of that Templar who claimed the idol was an image of Allah: the Koran forbids utterly any representation of God whatever, for this would be idolatry, and Islamic civilisation has always been most careful to respect this rule. The second feature is even more definite: according to one witness, the portrait of this supposed *Machomet* had horns![45] That proves beyond reasonable doubt that the tale has no relationship whatever with real Islam; it is the fruit of tortures carried out by inquisitors and goes exactly where the torturers wanted their witness to go, for their own reasons. No Christian who had anything actually to do with any Muslim group could ever have imagined them worshipping the Devil; in spite of all the strong religious differences, Muslims were highly devout and had a few essential points of faith in common with Christians - in particular, a single Creator God, who is a benevolent and just Father. Unarguable historical evidence tells us that a certain amount of inter-religious debate went on in Jerusalem, and it is at any rate well known that St. Francis of Assisi was received by the Sultan of Egypt and took part in a theological debate with him. In the Holy Land, Muslims were essentially political opponents, people who governed Jerusalem and Syria-Palestine alongside Christians; the whole history of the kingdom of Jerusalem is

full of alliances between Christian rulers and various local emirs, alliances based on common interests and setting religious differences aside. [46] In a country such as France, where no Muslim communities existed among the population, the common people had the most vague and bizarre ideas on their religious usages: the largely illiterate commoners, used to the simplistic idea that one went to the Holy Land to kill enemies of the faith, could easily be led to believe that those enemies of the faith had something dark and devilish about them. It is probably not a chance occurrence that this kind of rumour found no fertile ground either in Spain or in Cyprus, where contacts with Muslims were frequent and Christians had a much clearer view of them. Not that it made any difference to Nogaret whether or not the brothers worshipped Mohammed or even the Devil, so long as they could be charged with an unforgivable crime that struck deep into the imagination of the popular masses.

The shadow of Ridefort

In the current state of research, I think that the Templars who said that the idol was a portrait of *Mahomet* may have seen a vaguely human image, but strange or at least unlike those of the saints seen everywhere in the churches. Pressed by torture, and having no understanding whatever of the identity of the man represented, they were forced to make statements of that kind. Without a doubt it was the portrait of a man; but since nobody could understand who it was, then it must inevitably be something illicit. The fact is that there was no power in the mediaeval world to interpret freely a work of art, because all images were rigidly controlled, and therefore every personage could be recognised on sight. Mediaeval sacred art has fixed iconographic forms, because its purpose is not just to guide but to educate souls; already Pope Gregory I the Great (590-604) had strongly recommended to respect this precept: the faithful were largely illiterate and did not have the ability to understand too elaborate a set of concepts, so the figures that illustrated sacred history on the walls of churches were a great treasure-store for the people, forming the doctrine of the common person. [47]

There was an ancient, consolidated tradition, known to everyone and guiding them: St. Peter must always carry a large key in his hand, as the symbol of his power, St. Anthony the Abbot had to wear his monk's hood and have a meek little pig sitting by his feet, so that the faithful could recognise them immediately. Artists had to follow fixed schemes; their interpretative liberty was

limited to secondary details, and at any rate their work was evaluated by the relevant Church authorities. A representation of holy things that did not conform to Church tradition appeared suspicious and would be condemned, for it could create confusion in those who did not have enough culture to defend them from error. Had the Templar idol been a traditional image of any saint, the monks would have recognised him; instead, everyone who saw this portrait agreed that they could not tell who it was, that there were no elements to help identify him. Showings often took place at night: in the dark church, shaken by the irregular light of candles, the atmosphere became that of a mysterious and grim cult. Required to worship the portrait of someone they did not recognise, and conscious that it was a secret cult, the monks were awestruck and experienced these liturgies as terrible things.

The King of France's agents took advantage of this fact and tied it to the charge that the Templars had gone over to Islam thanks to an easy (and unhistorical) syllogism: the Order of the Temple is friendly to Muslims, in its ceremonies a man of unknown identity is worshipped; therefore that mysterious man must be the prophet of Islam, that is Mahomet. The accusation obviously had no roots in reality, since Islamic religion forbids the portraiture of Mohammed, and therefore even if many Templars had indeed gone over to Islam, this cult described in the trial would have been utterly impossible. But Nogaret was not concerned for the charge to be true, so long as it could be believed by that western world which was being asked to condemn the Order. The King's grand strategist had dusted off the shelf a rumour already over 100 years old, which had been popular for a while and had momentarily stained the Order's good name. When, in 1187, Saladin had won his memorable triumph at the Horns of Hattin, and taken back Jerusalem for Islam, he had always behaved most generously to the local Christians, granting freedom not only to the rich who could pay their ransoms, but also to the poor, for the mere love of God; it was only to the Templars and Hospitallers, the true thorns in his military side, he had shown no mercy whatsoever, and had had them beheaded. In that context, the Templar Grand Master Gérard de Ridefort, captured by the enemy, had been seen to come back unhurt to his people when everyone already believed him dead. As everyone knew how the Sultan saw the Templars, this had immediately struck everyone as most suspicious. Besides, Ridefort was well known as an adventurer, an opportunist, a traitor of friends, who had risen in Templar ranks without gaining anything like a good reputation on his way up. His reputation grew even worse when it became known that he had bartered his freedom with the surrender of Templar fortresses. In a word, he had betrayed the Order in the vilest of manners.[48] The conditions agreed at the time between Ridefort and

the Sultan had shocked Christian society so much that the echo of the scandal had been recorded in the Chronicle of St. Denis; besides, Christian society was appalled at the disaster just suffered, the military orders were being singled out by everyone as the main culprits in the failure, and a scapegoat hunt seemed inevitable. The cowardly, arrogant, unworthy Ridefort seemed born for the role.

This was the source that Guillaume de Nogaret pulled out of the shelves to charge the Templars of having gone over to Islam. A few similar rumours had spread again towards the end of the 13th century, when certain diplomatic agreements made by Christian leaders in the Holy Land with the Muslim enemy had not been understood in the West and had caused intense polemics. During the trial, Guillaume de Nogaret suddenly turned up and resurrected the whole affair, to which Jacques de Molay had to give an answer:

In the chronicles kept at the abbey of Saint-Denis, it was written that in the time of Saladin, sultan of Babylon, the Templar Grand Master of the time and the other heads of the order had paid homage to Saladin. Saladin in turn, having heard of the grave adversities being suffered by the Templars, said in public that they were meeting all that trouble because they had fallen into the vice of Sodom and prevaricated their faith and their laws. The Grand Master [Jacques de Molay] was astonished at those words, and he answered that he had never heard anything of the kind.

On the other hand, he knew that once upon a time, Guillaume de Beaujeu, the master of the Temple, used to murmur against the Grand Master, that he had served the Sultan and kept him sweet.

In the end, though, both he and the others were happy with that policy, because they understood that the Grand Master had had no choice. In those days, the Templar Order held several towns and fortresses, which he named, at the border of the Sultan's land, which could not have been defended by the Christians had the King of England not sent supplies. [49]

In the Holy Land, diplomacy was as much a weapon of war as weapons

themselves, perhaps even more: the first decades of the Crusader kingdom had enjoyed comparative quiet just because the Muslim powers abutting on it often preferred to make alliances with the Christians and remain autonomous than fall under the sway of a much bigger Islamic power. The work of Grand Master Beaujeu, who later died heroically at Saracen hands while he protected the flight of civilians by the sea, had been dictated by political reasons, and his full good faith had been shown by the news of that odd alliance had certainly led the ill-disposed to suspect that the Templars were inept because in reality they had no intention of attacking Islam because it had covertly gained their sympathies. The context and dynamics of the trial were to turn this scrap of gossip into a black accusation.[50]

Many faces

The Templars who described the idol as though it were a portrait of the Devil were full of surreal detail: the monster has many faces, he is associated with a black cat who always appears mysteriously, he is worshipped during a witches' Sabbath, he is even said to answer the monk who prays to him and promises hefty material advantages. Any historian would be immediately tempted to reject such descriptions, taking them for nothing but the sorry fruit of torture; however, it is better to avoid quick judgments, because experience shows that even the most absurd statements may sometimes conceal grains of truth in their depths, real facts that have to be brought to light by cleaning them from the many dark details added on by torture, by psychological violence, and by the awful suggestions raised by the atmosphere of the trial.

We know for instance that mediaeval Christian tradition used to represent the dogma of the Trinity by means of three separate but identical figures, or even by one body with three faces. It was the *vultus trifrons*, an arrangement thought up in the 1200s to somehow give a visual account of the complex concept of a single God in three Persons. During the Council of Trent (1545-1563) many features of popular religion that had previously been accepted by everyone were weighed and discussed, and among them the three-faced head: it was seen that this image was too much like certain ancient representations of pagan gods, such as the Roman Diana, whom Virgil calls in the *Aeneid* (IV, 511) "Virgin with three faces", or the Greek Hekate, goddess of the lower world, associated with the moon and represented with three faces to allude to its three phases – crescent, full, decreasing. Hekate was the queen of the otherworld, and in some

pagan magical texts she was called upon by magicians and sorcerers; in the Roman imagination and in that of early Christianity she was seen as an image of the Devil, even though the divinity did not originally have anything evil about her, and in the tradition of mediaeval art three-headed demonic monsters can sometimes be found (as for instance in the front of the church of St. Peter in Tuscania). In 1628, Pope Urbanus VIII forbade any further representation of the Trinity under that pagan-originated and, all things considered, monstrous scheme, and in 1745 Benedict XIV ordered that the three Persons should be only represented according to images found in Holy Scripture: the Father as a venerable elder, the "Ancient of Days" of the book of the prophet Daniel; the Son as a young man, and the Spirit in the shape of a dove. We know that the Order of the Temple was originally dedicated to the Holy Trinity, and the text approved in Troyes the founder and his followers are called, exactly, Knights of the Holy Trinity; we cannot in the least exclude that the churches of the Order included some sculptures of this very peculiar kind, little used in Gothic art but absolutely licit, used as late as the Renaissance in Donatello's decorations of the tabernacle of St. Thomas the Apostle in Orsanmichele, Florence.[51]

A magnificent manuscript from the Vatican Library, painted in Naples by Matteo Planisio in 1362, features a cycle of miniatures representing the creation of the world: God is represented as the Three Persons of the Trinity, that is a venerable elder with a two-faced head, one as an old man (the Father) and the other as a beardless teenaged boy (the Son), while the dove that represents the Holy Spirit rests on his shoulder. [52] If we exclude the dove, who is not equally visible in all the miniatures, one must admit that the Creator appears as a strange being with one head and two faces: the smooth-featured boy's face, with no facial hair, does in effect seem like a woman's. Mediaeval art does from time to time come up with this kind of invention, it does not find it so important to represent things realistically so much as to bring out symbolic and spiritual meanings. Certainly such images must have seemed monstrous to anyone who saw them without adequate preparation.

It's hard to tell what these simulacra described by some questioned Templars, with two, three or even four faces, ever stood for. Some testimonies certainly spoke of real things, sacred goods used for liturgy and cult, while others are no more than the deformed birth of terror and violence. For this purpose it can be very useful to consider the geographical areas where the various questionings took place. The trial took place practically all over Christendom, with inquiries in France, England, Scotland, Italy, Germany, the Spanish peninsula and Cyprus. And yet all the scary and filthy testimonies concentrate in France, especially in the historical region of Midi, which was the headquarters of the dreaded

Inquisition. From this region comes an unfortunately incomplete document, which can only be called "Languedoc Enquiry" since it lacks any reference to place and date of questioning. However, many clues suggest that the well-known inquisitor Bernard Gui was involved at least in the information-gathering stage. This document is an absolute mine of information about the factors that affected the trial, and does much to explain why scholars such as Nicolai, Hammer-Purgstall and many more could get such a grim picture of the ceremonies that took place in the Temple. [53]

Right from the first affidavit to survive without damage from the Languedoc enquiry, the interrogated monk, a sergeant called Guillaume Collier from Buisle-Baronnies (Drôme), told that he was admitted with a normal ceremony, but that immediately after the preceptor refuted some fundamental dogmas of Christianity, such as the divinity of Jesus and the Virgin Birth; then he opened a secret window in a part of the church, where a silver idol with no less than three faces was kept. He was told that that idol represented a mighty patron of the Order who could get them any kind of grace from Heaven. Then suddenly he saw a mysterious red cat appear near the idol; immediately the preceptor and all those present doffed their caps and paid homage to the idol, whose name was Mahomet (*Magometum*).[54]

This is a genuine cliché that forms a pattern for the path of confession and is repeated from affidavit to affidavit; however, as each successive Templar speaks, the pattern grows more elaborate and more gross, as in a kind of ghastly crescendo. According to the next monk to be questioned, another sergeant called Ponce de Alundo from Montélimar (again in the Drôme), the idol even has horns; indeed, it is no longer a simple image, but a real demon who even lives and speaks – the candidate talks with him as one would with a real person, asks him for material favours and is promised its support. This time the mysterious cat who appears by the idol is black, so more similar to the animal whom contemporary imagination placed with witches; by the preceptor's order, the devil-cat is to be adored and kissed on its anus. As we go on reading other testimonies, we find that the obscene detail of the kiss of the cat is a constant, and that the animal also seems to be nearly always black. However, two theatrical details appear: the magical feline vanishes miraculously as soon as he has received the new monk's homage, and someone concludes that it must in effect be the Devil in the shape of a cat. [55]

The records then bring in a further sensational development: a knight by the name of Geoffroy de Pierrevert, preceptor of the mansion of Rué in the department of Var, said that he had been present at an admission ceremony during which, apart from an idol with no less than four faces and a devil-cat, the

demonic presence was also manifested with the apparition of some women in black mantles, who materialised in the room even though all the doors had been closed and barred. According to him, the strange women had no carnal relations with the monks present at the ceremony. This surely disappointed greatly the inquisitors but they soon got their own back when during another session, Garnier de Luglet, from the diocese of Langres, said the witches who had appeared had indeed been allowed to corrupt the monks, vanishing immediately after they had dragged them along into deadly sin.[56]

In short, the questions were built according to a scheme that tended to dig through successive layers: first the accused was questioned about the idol's presence, then the questioner asked whether a cat was also present, and if the answer was not positive, they proceeded to investigate the animal's role in the ceremony and its real nature. With those who proved ready to give a positive answer in this crescendo, the questioning moved further, asking first about the apparition of witches, then hammering on the question about celebrating a demonic orgy. The procedures employed in Languedoc had unique features in the context of the broader trial. I think that it is beyond comparison that the area where the evidence is most polluted by the conscious intervention of the inquisitors: here the charges against the monks are much more serious than those conceived by Philip the Fair in his order of arrest, which was intended to get the Templars condemned as fast as possible. The very minutes of the investigation say it in so many words: witnesses would be first properly prepared with suitable tortures, then they were left several days to reflect (or recover at least enough to be able to speak), and finally were questioned again.

The way such trials were managed speaks volumes: during the inquest held in Poitiers from 28 June to 2 July, 1308, Clemens V interrogated, with the help of his assistant Cardinals, 72 Templars within five days; Philip the Fair himself and the Inquisitor of France Guillaume de Paris, immediately after the arrests, had questioned no less than 138 brothers captured in the Temple of Paris in barely a month, from 19 October to 24 November, 1307. The investigators who managed the Languedoc inquiry, however, took an amazing two months to question barely 25 persons; the "preparation" of witnesses must have been horrendous. [57]

A letter written by the Inquisitor of France Guillaume de Paris to Bernard Gui, the most famous Inquisitor of the 1300s, entrusts him with some operations in the trial against the Templars, and rouses a legitimate suspicion: the Languedoc inquiry, Languedoc being Bernard Gui's headquarters, did not follow the scheme of Guillaume de Nogaret, but rather another drawn up by the dreadful Inquisitor, who pursued charges of sorcery and devil-raising. [58] In the indictment written in Paris by the royal lawyers, the idol is in fact quite a marginal issue and there is

no trace whatever of devils; whereas, in the confession extracted from Templars in Languedoc, the strange idol is one and the same with the Devil in the shape of a cat and with witches, and the description of these sinister rituals takes up a great deal of the text. To the contrary, in the north of France, the charge of sodomy is placed very much to the forefront, as though it alone were enough to blast the Order's reputation beyond remedy, and a boy is found who is ready to confess that Jacques de Molay (who was well beyond 60) had even abused him no less than three times in a single night. [59]

In the south, on the other hand, sodomy went altogether unmentioned: maybe the ordinary mentality was more tolerant, or else it was simply decided to go for something much more "explosive". In a way, the idol had indeed many faces: faces different from each other, indeed sometimes incompatible, which the prosecutors hid or showed according to what the tastes and fears of the public were.

- [1] Partner, I *Templari*, pp.155-159.
- [2] Partner, I *Templari*, pp.115-132
- [3] Ibid. pp. 106-109.
- [4] Capitani, Gregorio VII, pp,189-203; Traniello, Giovanni XXIII, p.646; Rapp, Il consolidamento del papato, pp.119-123.
- [5] Stove, Magdeburger Centuriatoren, col. 1185
- [6] Partner, I *Templari*, pp.133-154
- [7] Koch, Hammer-Purgstall, Joseph Frh. von, p. 401
- [8] Schottmüller, II, p.90; Finke, II, p. 323
- [9] Peterson, Ofiti. coll. 80-81; Camelot, Ophites, coll. 100-101.
- [10] Hammer-Purgstall, Mémoire sur deux coffrets, pp. 84-134; Mignard, Monographie du coffret, pp.136-221
- [11] Partner, *I Templari*, pp. 160-162; Introvigne, *Il < Codice da Vinci >*, pp. 116-129.
- [12] Jung, Nicolai (Christophe) Friedrich, p. 446; Schilson, Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, coll. 851-852.
- [13] Penna, *I ritratti*, I, pp. 11-13.
- [14] Marini, *Memorie storiche*, pp. CCXXIII-CCXLIX; about the Galileo trial, see Pagano, *I documenti del processo*.
- [15] See veda Pagano, Leone XIII e l'apertura dell'Archivio Segreto, pp. 44-63.
- [16] Gualdo, Sussidi per la consultazione, pp. 34-40; Gadille, Le grandi correnti dottrinali, pp. 111-132, alla p. 113.
- [17] Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio* XX 91-96.
- [18] On their origins, see for instance Barber, *The New Knighthood*, pp. 1-37; Demurger, *Vita e morte*, pp. 20-23, and Ibid. *Chevaliers du Christ*, pp. 36-40.
- [19] Demurger, *Vita e morte*, pp. 54-57. The original name is reconstructed by Tommasi, *Pauperes commilitones Christi*, pp. 443-475.
- [20] Demurger, Vita e morte, p. 22.
- [21] Hiestand, *Kardinalbischof Matthäus von Albano*, pp. 17-37; Cardini, I *poveri commilitoni*, pp. 81-114, Cerrini, *La rivoluzione dei Templari*.
- [22] D'Albon, Cartulaire général de l'Ordre du Temple, nn. 5, 8, 10.

- [23] Curzon, *Règle*, § 16; Cerrini, *Une expérience neuve*, § 6; Barbero, *L'aristocrazia nella società francese*, pp. 243-324; Demurger, *Vita e morte*, pp. 66-67.
- [24] Curzon, *Règle* 87-88; Michelet, Le Procès, II, pp. 361-363.
- [25] See for instance Michelet, *Le procès*, I, pp. 646-647; Schottmüller, II, pp. 392-393.
- [26] Gaier, Armes et combats, pp. 47-56; Demurger, Chevaliers du Christ, pp. 41-43, 131-147.
- [27] See *The Horns of Hattin*, ed. B.Z. Kedar, Jerusalem 1988, passim, and Lyons & Jackson, *Saladin*, pp.255-277.
- [28] See the items collected in *Quarta crociata*.
- [29] Demurger, *Trésor des templiers*, pp. 73-85; Di Fazio, *Lombardi e Templari*; Metcalf, *The Templars as Bankers*; Piquet, *Des banquiers au moyen âge*.
- [30] Demurger, Vita e morte, pp. 235-236; Barber, The New Knighthood, pp. 119-220.
- [31] Ibid., see for instance pp. 213, 217, 236-237; Favreau-Lilie, *The Military*, pp. 201-227; Edbury, *The Templars in Cyprus*, pp. 189-195.
- [32] Frale, *L'ultima battaglia dei Templari*, pp. 43-48; Lizérand, *Le dossier*, pp. 2-15.
- [33] Lizérand, *Le dossier*, pp. 16-19. .
- [34] Frale, L'ultima battaglia dei Templari, pp. 311-323.
- [35] Ibid., pp. 169-205.
- [36] Frale, *Il papato e il processo ai Templari*, pp. 139-192.
- [37] Frale, *L'ultima battaglia dei Templari*, pp. 265-299.
- [38] The Bull's text is in Villanueva, Viaje literario, V, pp. 207-221; Barber, The Trial, pp. 227-234.
- [39] Frale, L'ultima battaglia dei Templari, pp. 300-304; Demurger, Jacques de Molay, pp. 263-277.
- [40] Frale, *L'ultima battaglia dei Templari*, pp. 207-263.
- [41] Michelet, *Le Procès*, II, 363-365; I, 394-402.
- [42] See for example Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, for instance pp. 243, 253-254, 258, 259 ecc.
- [43] Ibid., pp. 243-245; Bini, *Dei Tempieri*, p. 474; Sève, *Le procès*, p. 114; Finke, II, p. 323.
- [44] Gilmour-Bryson, *The Trial*, p. 255; Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, pp. 252-253.
- [45] Ibid., pp. 245-246.
- [46] Tommaso da Celano, San Francesco, p. 73; Cardini, Francesco d'Assisi, pp. 178-208.
- [47] Gregory the Great, *Letters*, IX, epist. LII, in PL 77, 971.
- [48] Runciman, Storia delle crociate, II, pp. 628, 660-675; Lyons & Jackson, Saladin, pp. 250, 303-304.
- [49] Michelet, *Le Procès*, I, pp. 44-45.
- [50] See for instance Michelet, *Le Procès*, I, p. 187; II, pp. 209, 215.
- [51] Wehr, Trinità, arte, coll. 544-545; Naz, Images, coll. 1257-1258; Curzon, La Règle, §9.
- [52] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 3550, f. 5r.
- [53] Frale, L'interrogatorio ai Templari, for instance pp. 254, 255, ecc.; Ménard, Histoire civile, Preuves, p.
- 210; Michelet, *Le Procès*, II, p. 363.
- [54] Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, pp. 243-245.
- [55] Ibid., pp. 245-246
- [<u>56</u>] Ibid., pp. 256-257, 267-269.
- [57] Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Archivum Arcis*, Armarium D 208, 209, 210 (number 217 is the Chinon parchment), and Reg. Av. 48, ff. 437r-451v): about the edition, see Schottmüller, II, pp. 9-71; Finke, II, pp. 324-342; Michelet, *Le Procès*, II, pp. 275-420; Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, pp. 199-272, alla p. 226.
- [58] Frale, *Du catharisme à la sorcellerie*, pp. 168-186; Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, pp. 199-242. On the myth of the idol, see also Reinach, *La tête magique*, pp. 25-39.
- [59] Michelet, *Le Procès*, II, pp. 289-290.

II Behold the man!

A peculiar sacredness

Once we have cleared the field of all the confusion and ascertained the origin of the charges of Islamism and black magic, the other descriptions of the Templars' idol seem suddenly very concrete; it's simply a human portrait, made of diverse materials and representing an unknown man. It's in this group of realistic observations, descriptions of simple objects of sacred art, that we find the most interesting data. The idol is a simple object, although for some reason the Templars seem to see it as incomparably valuable. That it was a portrait came out immediately, during the very first interrogations that followed the arrests of October 1307; but the sensationalism with which the Templars' arrest had been advertised confused everyone's ideas. People had started yelling about heresy and sorcery, and now they saw them everywhere.

Sergeant Rayner de Larchent saw it twelve times during twelve separate general chapters, and the last was the one held in Paris the Tuesday after the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the July before the arrest. As he described it, it was a bearded head that the monks kissed, calling it their "saviour"; he did not know where it was placed or who kept it, but he guessed that it was the Grand Master or the officer who oversaw the general chapter. It was also seen in Paris by brothers Gautier de Liencourt, Jean de La Tour, Jean le Duc, Guillaume d'Erreblay, Raoul de Gisy and Jean de Le Puy. The ceremonial display was presided over by the Grand Master, or more often the Visitor of the West, Hugues de Pérraud, who was the second in the Templar hierarchy and became the most powerful templar in Europe when the Grand Master happened to be in the East. [1] When questioned, Hugues de Pérraud admitted the existence of this idol and its cult, but said precious little to help us in our modern historical research.

Of the head we just mentioned, he said under oath that he saw, held and touched it near Montpellier during a chapter. Both he and the other brothers worshipped it: he, however, only pretended adoration, acting with the mouth but not with the heart, and could not say who else offered adoration from the heart. Asked where the idol was, he said that he left it with brother Pierre Allemandin, who was preceptor of the mansion of Montpellier: but he could not say whether the King's agents would find it. He said that this head had four feet, two in front on the side of the face, and two behind.[2]

The testimony does not specify what kind of simulacrum this was. However, it states that it had four feet, which points at a three-dimensional object held up by supports.

At the end of his and the Roman Curia's inquest in the summer of 1308, the Pope removed the investigations from the inquisitors and decreed that they were to be handed over in each territory to special commissions formed by the local bishops. These were not dependent on the King of France and did not have to follow the plans of his legal strategists; the Pope only tasked them with shedding light on that thorny affair. Some of these bishops may not have loved the Templars for personal reasons; it is well known that there was widespread envy towards this rich and powerful religious order with its many privileges: but they had no direct interest in persecuting as was the case with the King and with Guillaume de Nogaret's group. It's hardly surprising that it is during the investigations carried out by diocesan bishops many of the accusations thrown in the previous period started to totter, while others suddenly took a more rational and credible aspect. The diocesan bishops swiftly came to understand that the Templars' notorious idol-head was in fact a reliquary, an upper bust sculpture containing the remains of some saint, a very widespread class of object in mediaeval sacred art: this comes out clearly as soon as the management of interrogations was handed over to the Pope, and in the very inquiry held in Poitiers in June 1308, Clemens V was able to come to the conclusion himself. In his presence, the sergeant brother Étienne de Troyes said:

Concerning the head, he said that it was the Order's custom to celebrate each year a general chapter on the day of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and one of those was held in Paris the year he was admitted into the Order. He took part in the Chapter all the three days it lasted: they would begin in the first watch of the night and went on until the first hour of day. During the first night of the chapter they carried a

head: it was borne by a priest, who was preceded as he moved forth by two brothers who held large torches and burning candles in silver candelabra. The priest laid they head over the altar, on two pillows and a silken carpet. The witness thought it was a head of human flesh, from the top of the skull to the knot of the epiglottis; it had white hair, and nothing covered it. The face also was of human flesh, and seemed to him very livid and discoloured, with a beard of mixed white and dark hair, similar to the beard that Templars wear. Then the Order's Visitor said: "Let us worship him and pay him homage, for it is he who made us and it is he who can dismiss us". They all approached it with the highest reverence and paid it homage and worshipped that head. He heard someone say that that skull had belonged to the first Master of the Order, brother Hugues de Payns: from the Adam's apple to its shoulder blades, it was covered in gold and silver and studded with precious stones.[3]

The same object, in all likelihood a reliquary of the founder, Hugues de Payns, was also seen in the Temple of Paris by brother Bartholomé Bocher of the Chartres diocese, who joined the order in 1270; according to him, the reliquary did not stay in that place, but was only carried there during special occasions, and was then taken off and put away elsewhere:

The Templar who welcomed him into the order showed him a certain head that someone had placed on the altar of that little chapel by the sanctuary and the vases with the relics; he was told that when he was in difficulties, he should call on the help of that head. Asked how that head was made, he answered that it looked like the head of a Templar, with the head cover and a hoary and long beard; but he could not tell whether it was made of metal, wood, bone or human flesh, and his preceptor did not explain whose head it was. He had never seen it before nor did he see it afterwards, although he must have been in that chapel at least a hundred times. [4]

There was a certain suggestive power about this tale, told in the Pope's presence, as he had for the first time the opportunity to personally listen to the Templars after nearly a year of hearing accusations and dreadful rumours. The

scene of that mysterious cult, emerging from the dark in the shaky light of candles, indubitably could not make a positive impression on him. But in and of itself, the witness was not very serious. The Templars paid special cult to their founder Hugues de Payns, revering him as a great saint during certain nocturnal liturgies, and exposed his head, whether mummified or naturally preserved, within a large and precious reliquary. Hugues de Payns had never been officially canonized, and to the Church of Rome he remained simply a conversus who had chosen to serve God in the same way as countless other unknown priests and monks. Hugues de Payns had never been raised to the honour of altars, and Clemens V, as a specialist in canon law, could not look kindly on such solemn veneration; but in the Middle Ages people used to regard some people as saints purely for their simple lifestyle, even during their lifetimes. As soon as they died, their bodies and the objects they had owned immediately became precious relics, people started coming to pray on their graves, asking for miracles and intercessions with God, without waiting for the Church to complete its long, prudent bureaucratic process. Saints were made by popular acclamation. When the rumour spread through Assisi that Francis was dying in the Porziuncola, the people started praying, waiting impatiently to be finally allowed to see and worship the stigmata on his body: this is a famous and peculiar case, but many more could be mentioned.[5]

The idea that contact with the body of saints had beneficent effects was certainly no mediaeval innovation. It belonged to the most ancient Christian tradition: the *Book of Acts* tells that people approached Paul as he was preaching, and the faithful would touch his clothes with silken handkerchiefs, because they were certain that they were making relics for themselves. The Apostle's divine charisma passed from his body to clothes and kerchiefs. [6] It might be that their worship of their founder Hugues de Payns, whom they held to be a holy man, may have led Clemens V to admonish them to reduce the cult to more sober proportions; but it was very, very far from evidence of heresy. As a matter of fact, in the Cyprus interrogations, carried out by a commission of local prelates a thousand miles from Philip the Fair and his pressure, the Templars absolutely denied any charge to do with deviant behaviours or ideas where religion was concerned. Furthermore, many secular nobles, priests, and religious from other orders offered to testify, declaring that the Templars observed the cult with exemplary devotion. It seems that they practised very peculiar and beautiful liturgies of adoration of the Cross during Good Friday, in which others who were not Order members would also take part. A priest said that he would celebrate Mass in Temple churches, and had from time to time celebrated jointly with Order chaplains: the formulas of consecration of the Host were spoken exactly as

required. A Dominican who often carried out religious service with the Templars said that he had heard many of them in Confession, both in Cyprus and in France, and none of them had heretical attitudes on their conscience. [7]

The charge of idolatry and disbelief in the Eucharist soon proved utterly hollow. And yet Guillaume de Nogaret and his assistants had gone about building it just as they had done with the other charges: the method of half truths. They had started from a core of actual facts, a breadcrumb of truth suitably amplified and distorted.

Intuitions

In 1978, Ian Wilson published an essay titled The Turin Shroud: The Burial Cloth of Jesus Christ? It was a well written and a rather well researched book, following the story of the Shroud over almost 2,000 years, from Gospel descriptions to the latest scientific investigations from 1973. Out of this broad panorama, the author dedicated a chapter of some 15 pages to the investigation of a rather bold theory of his: there was in the history of the Shroud a "hole", an empty space of about a century and a half (from 1204 to 1353) during which this object seems to disappear from historical sources. On the basis of evidence drawn both from documents and from objects the Templars had owned, the author maintained that the mysterious "idol" worshipped by the Templars was in fact the shroud kept at present in Turin, folded on itself and kept in a container designed to show only the face. The theory made a great impression, because in its light several obscure points in the story of the Templars also became easily understandable; Wilson, however, did not specialise in this subject, knew only the most famous sources on the trial, and much precious data escaped him. In any case, those 15 pages contained an intuition of immense historical interest, and left the scholarly community with a burning curiosity that the few bits of evidence used could not possibly satisfy. In recent years, the sources on the trial against the Templars have been investigated both in much greater depth and more systematically than had been the case in the past, and this has led us to bring to light historical truths that once seemed dubious, out of focus, indeed shadowy. Can they also tell us something about the relationship between the Templars and the Shroud? Luckily, yes, quite a bit; thanks mainly to some testimonies left as it were "hidden" in an authentic document little known to the experts. A document that seemed to have little to offer to the study of the political and judicial aspects of the trial, but that could not matter more in the

study of Templar spirituality. Templar experts barely mention these facts in their studies, and the same happens in another area that has been investigated by scientific methods for over a century: that is, sindonology, the complex of studies about the Shroud of Turin. I think it better to show the reader this new evidence from Templar matters by discussing it on its own, that is, without reference to Wilson's theory: this is to avoid that two strands of argument should superimpose themselves on each other, and condition each other. We shall therefore see the bare sources, just as they appear to the researcher who first reads them, without influences gained from reading other studies. Later the material will be compared with Wilson's intuitions and we can verify what historical scenario arises from it.

Throughout the second phase of the trial against the Templars, the one which took place after summer 1308 when the investigations were being carried out by diocesan bishops, the investigators began to be certain that the Templars' "head" was in fact the reliquary of some saint, and started asking clear-headed questions to this purpose. A significant case is that of sergeant Guillaume d'Erreblay, a sometime almsgiver for the King of France, who was questioned by the commission of bishops who managed the Paris investigation in 1309-1311. This man had often seen a handsome reliquary in silver used in the normal Temple liturgies, exhibited to the veneration of the faithful who came to pray in the Order's churches. Some said that it was the reliquary of the Eleven Thousand Virgin companions of St.Ursula who were martyred in Cologne, and that was what he too had used to believe. However, after the arrest, and under the psychological power of the prosecution, it occurred to him that there were many odd things: for he seemed to recall that that reliquary had a monstrous aspect, with two faces, even, of which one had a beard.[8] A modern historian will suspect that the witness has been badly affected by the context of the trial, to the point of talking nonsense: how could anyone exhibit to the veneration of the faithful the portrait of a girl saint – with two faces, and a beard besides? In fact, this Templar must have described two different objects. It was only from other brothers that he heard of the reliquary of the Eleven Thousand Virgins, while what he saw himself with his own eyes may indeed have had two faces. His description is identical to the miniatures painted by the painter Matteo Planisio on the manuscript Vaticano latino 3550, where the Creator is shown with two faces, one bearded and masculine (the Person of the Father) and one of an adolescent youth (the Son), who may well look like a woman's. The superb Neapolitan miniature is one instance, who knows how many similar objects existed in mediaeval churches.

The commissioner bishops took the statement and immediately ordered a

check; it was thus found that the Temple of Paris really did hold a reliquary with the bones of one of the Eleven Thousand Virgins, but that far from being monstrous; it was handsome and represented a perfectly normal young woman's face.

> At that point, the designated guardian of the Order's goods after the arrest, a certain Guillaume Pidoye, who held the crates containing the relics found in the Templar mansion of Paris, was called to the hearing. The guardian was ordered to take to the trial every object shaped as a head, whether of wood, or metal, that was found in that building; he then handed over to the Commissioners a large, handsome gold-plated silver reliquary that represented a girl. Inside they found bones that seemed to be part of a skull, sewn in a white linen cloth and then placed in another red cloth. Along with the cloth there was a small ticket that said "testa LVIII M": the head seemed to belong to a girl child and some said they were relics of one of the Eleven Thousand Virgins. Since the guardian stated that there was no other head-shaped object, the Commissioners summoned Guillaume d'Erreblay and showed him the reliquary: but the Templar said it was not the same, and that he doubted he had ever seen that one in the Temple's mansion. [9]

To discover that the Templars' mysterious head was in fact a silver reliquary weakened the prosecution's structure of accusations, since it roused suspicions that the other charges against the Templars could be the result of similar distortions. It is however true that the commissioners noticed that the order had peculiar liturgies and cults which the brothers did not clearly understand. Sergeant Pierre Maurin had been inducted into the Order by Grand Master Thibaut Gaudin in about 1286, in a room of the great Templar mansion of Château-Pélerin in the Holy Land; on that occasion he was shown no simulacra of any kind, but he became very curious when he was handed the little linen strand, which he had the duty never to take off although nobody seemed clear on just what it was for. When two or three years had gone, one day, while he was in Château-Pélerin he found out from fellow brother Pierre de Vienne that a mysterious cult object was preserved in the central treasury of the Temple in Acre, and that this object was in the shape of a head; all the Templars' linen strands were consecrated by touching this head. The reliquary was said to

contain remains from the head of St. Blaise or of St. Peter; but from that day on he started feeling strong unease and no longer wanted to wear the strand on his body.[10]

On the other hand, the treasurer of the Paris Temple, Jean de la Tour, saw a portrait painting on a board that was hung in the Order's chapel near the central crucifix. He could not find out who the person represented was, and he thought that it must be the image of some saint: he was however certain that the man could not be a Templar, for he did not wear the typical Templar dress. Anyway it was certainly not monstrous, and though he refused to worship it, the sight of it caused no kind of fear. [11]

The trail of the male portrait, with the figure of a man whose identity was unknown to the Templars themselves, is surely the most interesting; it seems to point straight to the notion of a most sacred figure, worshipped by the Templars with the highest devotion, even though only a very few among them know who he is, and in fact he is not easy to recognize: those who saw him have trouble describing him. What is it?

A man's image on a cloth

The records of the interrogations carried out on the Templars jailed in Carcassonne in the winter of 1307, that is a few months after the arrests, has survived in a single document kept in the Paris National Archives: a copy on paper made to be sent to Philip the Fair. The material is much darkened and is not in a good state of preservation, but it is perfectly readable to anyone who is familiar with the sources of the trial against the order of the Temple. Early in the 20th century, Heinrich Finke tried to publish it, but found it exhausting and finally made a somewhat questionable decision to transcribe into his edition of Templar trial documents only the few passages he had identified. These were bitten-off chunks of sentences, stitched together with dotted lines to indicate the many things he had not managed to read. These brief gobbets of Latin in the middle of a flow of academic German form a bizarre linguistic patchwork: the whole thing is most remote from the norms of today's historians and really quite enough to confuse anyone. That may be why this has been so far practically ignored by historians as a source. I have presented and discussed this source, along with many others, in my doctoral thesis in history at the University of Venice (1996-1999), when I was collecting all surviving evidence from the trial to make a systematic analysis of the data and compare them with each other. Its

content struck me immediately as of immense interest, because I think that, together with so much other data, it proves that the mysterious idol of the Templars was a very famous object with a well-defined identity. It was effectively a portrait, but the least that can be said is that it was not just any portrait.

The Templar brother Guillaume Bos, received about 1297 in the Templar command of Perouse near Narbonne, was shown an "idol" of peculiar shape, a very different image from the others, which were mostly reliquaries worked in bas-relief. It was a kind of monochromatic drawing, a dark image on the light background of a cloth that seemed to his eyes like cotton cloth (*signum fustanium*):

and immediately a kind of drawing on a cloth was taken to the same place and spread out in front of him. Asked whose figure it represented, he answered that he was so astonished at what he had been told to do that he could hardly see it, nor could he distinguish very well what person was represented in the drawing; it seemed to him, however, to be made of white and black, and he paid it worship. [12]

Jean Taylafer, heard in Paris during the long inquiry of 1309-1311, saw the same kind of object: it also was a kind of drawing with an ill-defined shape, made of a tint that seemed reddish to him, and he could only distinguish the image of a face that had the natural dimensions of a human head. Like Guillaume Bos, he could not be sure whether it was a painting or not, but in that case too it was an image made from a single colour. Another Templar called Arnaut Sabbatier, on the other hand, said explicitly that he had been shown the whole figure of a man's body on a linen cloth, and the was ordered to worship him three times, kissing his feet (quoddam lineum habentem ymaginem hominis, quod adoravit ter pedes obsculand).[13]

The document is authentic, and, in spite of its less than perfect condition, the passage can clearly be read. Unless we reject the reality of the historical source, it shows that some Templars in southern France were shown an "idol" identical to the Shroud of Turin, which is exactly a linen cloth showing a man's image. Nor can there be any doubt that the figure contained the entire body, not just the head; the witness says in so many words that the Templars worshipped him by kissing his feet. Nobody can deny that the Shroud, if seen for the first time by

someone who has no idea what it is, will seem just like some kind of imprint or large, ill-defined stain over a long piece of linen, a clear imprint with no holding line or contour, showing the features of a man's body. It is a characteristic of the image that it becomes visible or invisible according to the distance from which it is seen, which immediately reminds us of Templar witnesses who remembered that the idol "appeared and disappeared" suddenly. There really are many clues to suggest that the various descriptions of the Templar idol are nothing but an account of the Shroud of Turin, rendered in an imprecise and fragmentary manner by persons who could only look at it for a short time, most often in a container that only showed its head; we should not forget that the Templar ceremonies took place in the earliest hours of the morning, before the Sun had yet risen; so this object was seen, practically speaking, in dark rooms, and above all without the faintest idea of what it was. Arnaut Sabbatier's evidence, on the other hand, describes explicitly an obstension (a religious exhibition or display) of the actual Shroud, when the cloth was fully unfolded to show the image of the whole body. It also describes a precise liturgy of worship which involves a threefold kiss on the mark of the feet; curiously enough, the same gesture, offered with the highest devotion, by St. Charles Borromeo and his company of priests during their famous pilgrimage on foot from Milan to Turin to see the Shroud in October 1578. The Jesuit Francesco Adorno, who went with St. Charles and wrote an account of events, knew perfectly well what he was going to see, and yet stated that he was completely astonished and as if dumbstruck before the cloth: the same kind of emotion described by so many Templars in the trial. Indeed, the Jesuit had already seen a fine copy of the Shroud, made by order of its owner, Duke Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy. Yet the original was something else: the picture on the cloth of Turin left the impression of a living, suffering man giving up his last breath.[14] The Templars worshipped the Shroud in the same way as St. Charles Borromeo did three centuries or so later, at least those among them who had the privilege to contemplate the original relic and not one of the many copies scattered around the commands of the Order. According to Adorno, St. Charles and a few others also kissed the wound in the side, besides those of the feet; and by the regretful tone easily felt in his words, one can guess that he did not have that great privilege. As of now, we don't know whether the Templars used to kiss the side as well; the monk who left his account of this cult was fairly low in Templar hierarchy, and everything leads me to think that the privilege of kissing the wound in the side would be, if anything, kept for the highest dignitaries.

The wounded side of Jesus, from which according to the Gospel of John had come blood and water, has moved Christian emotions deeply from the most

ancient times. They were certain that it had an immense value, and that it was in some way a mark of the divinity of Jesus: some scholars argue that the evangelist himself who tells the story also ascribes to it a strong theological significance, since in his culture water is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Christian tradition claims that the Church itself had been born from that wound, just as a child is born from the pain and the love of a mother. Most monks were ignorant, but among the dignitaries there were some educated persons; we can mention, for instance, the poet Ricaut Bonomel, who wrote a poem on the fall of the Holy Land that became and remained famous; or the chaplain Peter of Bologna, an outstanding legal expert who struggled to defend his Order during the trial. At any rate it took no great intellectual to understand that that wound on the side was the source of the Eucharist, which the priest celebrated on the altar exactly by mixing wine and water in memory of that Gospel passage. [15]

For several reasons I will explain comprehensively later on, the Templars were deeply fascinated by that wound through the ribs, and in their eyes it had incomparable value. Perhaps they thought it too holy for anyone to dare to touch it, at least anyone who was not a Templar of the modest rank of the man who had left his witness to the Carcassonne enquiry.

The information that the Templars worshipped the image of a man on a linen cloth clearly spread and ended up rousing the curiosity of the commons, perhaps much more widely than the sources would let us know today. In fact, it was even recorded in the Chronicle of Saint-Denys, the vast book of memories written by the Parisian abbey that was particularly bound with the Crown of France. The monks of St. Denys did not see the Templars' idol either as a likeness of the Devil or as a portrait of Mohammed, but rather described it in essentially two different forms:

And shortly after they began to worship a false idol. According to some of them this idol was made from a very ancient human skin, that seemed embalmed [une vieille peau ainsi comme toute embasmeé], or else in the shape of a washed cloth [toile polie]: in it do the Templars place all their most vile faith, and in it they believe blindly.[16]

In the end, the matter of the notorious Templar idol was a real fiasco for the prosecution, especially when they tried to colour this object with the dark tints of sorcery. Nogaret had felt it from the beginning: during the first interrogation, carried out in Paris by the Inquisitor of France, the ground had been tested, but

Templars who knew anything about it were too few and gave wildly confused descriptions. So the royal lawyers had decided to pass over the matter and aim instead for charges that nearly every brother would be ready to admit. The inquisitors of the Midi, true professionals of the witch-hunt, gave the Templar idol the connotations of incarnate evil according to their own peculiar mentality: maybe they acted in the most complete bad faith, or maybe they had themselves somehow fallen under the spell of their ghastly profession, prisoners of the spectres created by their minds even as they heard out the confessions of unfortunate victims. At any rate, the idol as an image of the Devil or a portrait of Mohammed did not travel very far beyond the grand inquiry of Languedoc, which was beyond argument the most bloodthirsty in the entire trial. Later on, when, after the summer of 1308, Pope Clemens V managed to hand the investigations over to commissions made up of local bishops, the idol's nature grew clearer, an increasingly detailed compound picture of two liturgical objects: the first was a reliquary in bas-relief containing the remains of some saint or other, the other a very strange linen cloth which bore the mark of the whole figure of a man in monochromatic drawing, a kind of imprint with ill-defined features.

The power of contact

Whoever the mysterious man worshipped by the Templars may have been, he was regarded as so sacred and mighty that someone, at some still unknown point of Templar history, had thought it best to make sure that his charisma should reach and protect Templars physically throughout their lives. And this even without their knowledge, thanks to a small object that kept and passed on his power. The trial sources include many statements ascribing to the Templars' little linen strand a very special kind of sacredness, derived from contact with an object worthy of the highest reverence: very few of them knew that it had been consecrated by the power of a most highly venerable object, and within this narrow circle someone was aware that the strands were themselves potent relics, for they had been made holy thanks to contact with the "idol".[17]

The use of wearing always, even at night, a little strand of linen above one's shirt had been introduced as early as St. Bernard's Rule, approved in Troyes in 1129. It meaning was chiefly symbolic, for it was a kind of warning to keep the vow of chastity. Sleeping with one's pants on and with the tight belt over one's shirt was seen as a very decent thing, since the brothers slept in dormitories with

their beds next to each other; the light of little lanterns would burn all night, to protect honest intimacy and discourage the ill-intentioned of any kind, including persons looking for undesirable encounters. [18]

As time went on, though, the awareness of this ancient meaning was lost, to the point where at the time of the trial only a few remembered it. At some point in the 13th century, a new symbolic tradition to do with the linen strand arose and spread, because the original tradition was at this point obsolete; by 1250, the Templars used to consecrate the strands in their habit by placing them into contact with the most important places in the Holy Land connected with Jesus' life, or else with individual relics kept in *Outremer* and greatly venerated in the Order.

The knight Guy Dauphin, Preceptor of the Temple in the French region of Auvergne and member of the General Staff, explained it clearly during the trial:

he said they would wear a thin strand over their shirts with which they slept as a sign of chastity and humility; the strands he himself wore had touched a pillar that stood in Nazareth, exactly in the place where the angel made his annunciation to the Virgin Mary, while others had touched precious relics kept beyond the sea, such as those of Sts Polycarpus and Euphemia. [19]

Guy Dauphin had been received among the Templars in 1281, but the habit of consecrating the strands through contact with relics was older. The knight brother Gérard de Saint-Martial, an old man at the time of the trial, had joined the Temple in 1258 and said that it was usual to turn the strand into a relic by consecrating it with the sacred charisma of the Basilica of Nazareth, in the place where the archangel Gabriel had taken to the Virgin the news of Incarnation. [20]

How is this habit to be explained? The answer is very simple and may already be found in the Bible, which expresses the religious mentality of Hebraism, from which comes that of Christianity. When God appeared to Moses on Mount Horeb in the shape of a burning bush that was not consumed, he ordered him to remove his sandals, for that was holy ground (Ex 3, 1-6). The place would always have kept some of the power of that Supreme Being who had manifested Himself there, and to touch the holy soil would always have been of great benefit for the faithful. After 1250, Jerusalem having been lost for decades and the chance of recovery growing ever more remote, the Templars felt the need to keep physical contact with the place of Christ's life; so they got into the habit of

making individual relics to carry constantly on their bodies, as a defence against sins of the soul and dangers of battle. This, after all, suited well their nature of military and religious order, and St Bernard also had underlined that the Templar is always fighting, on two fronts, all the days of his life. During the previous decades, when Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre had been guarded by Christians, the Templars would go to the great basilica to celebrate particular nocturnal liturgies of which the sources tell us nothing: probably they consecrated their linen strands, the symbol of the religious vows of the Temple, resting them on that very stone where the corpse of Jesus had been placed after the Crucifixion.[21] If that is the case, they would make them priceless relics of the Passion of Christ, to be kept for ever on oneself, guarding one's physical and spiritual salvation. Later, having lost the Sepulchre to Saladin's re-conquest, they had to resign themselves to consecrating their strands with something different; other Holy Places of the Christian Kingdom, which however certainly did not have the same value of the Sepulchre, or else relics that the Order had acquired, which in the second half of the 1200s formed a treasure kept in the city of Acre.

Among the Templars, a rumour kept going around that the mysterious "idol" was kept exactly in the treasury of Acre, and everything leads us to believe that its identity was kept secret from most of the monks. [22] Whatever it was, there were several copies owned by the Order and scattered among its commands; these simulacra seem to have been exhibited to be worshipped by Templars, but also by secular faithful who used the Order's churches, as if they belonged to some mysterious sacred figure who protected the Order especially. The portrait was considered more like a relic than a simple image, it was kept and exhibited together with other Templar-owned relics, and the liturgy by which it was honoured included the ritual kiss traditionally given to relics.[23] According to some Templars, the idol was called "the saviour"; it was prayed to not for material benefits such as wealth, success in love, or worldly power, but rather for the highest Christian goal, salvation of the soul.[24]

Can we know with any degree of certainty who the man represented in the portrait was? Fortunately, we can. In 1268, Sultan Baibars conquered the fortress of Saphed from the Templars; he was certainly astonished to find, in the fortress' main room – the one where the order's charter was held – a bas-relief featuring the head of a bearded man. The Sultan could not understand who that man was supposed to be, and unfortunately modern historians are no better off, for the monument was destroyed. There are however other figurations of the same character, found on objects that certainly have belonged to the Templars, objects preserved to this day and which allow us to see, we might even say touch with our hands, the identity of the mysterious man: some seals of Temple Masters

kept in German archives, and bearing on the verso nothing else than a portrait of a bearded man, and a wooden panel found in the church of the Templar mansion of Templecombe, in England.

Without any doubt, these are copies of the Face of Christ, represented without aureole or neck, as if the head had been somehow separated from the rest of the body. It is a fairly rare iconographic model in mediaeval Europe, but extremely widespread in the East, for it reproduces the true aspect of Christ such as it appeared in the *mandylion*, the most precious of all relics owned by the Emperors of Byzantium. A very ancient tradition told that it was a portrait of Christ made not by human hands, but created miraculously when Jesus had passed a towel (Greek, mandylion) over his face; that is, it was not properly speaking a portrait, but an imprint. Kept in the great sacred treasury of the Imperial palace in Constantinople, the *mandylion* was copied in countless frescoes, miniatures, icons on wooden boards, and the tradition of this miraculous portrait eventually spread slowly to the West. To this day, some of Europe's greatest basilicas have works of art that reproduce it, such as the icon on cloth known as the Holy Face of Manoppello, those kept in Genoa, Jaen, Alicante, the one preserved in St. Peter's Vatican inside the chapel of Matilda of Canossa; all copies of the *mandylion*, made in the East. [25]

What is particularly interesting about the table of the Templar church of Templecombe is that it reproduces the very shape of the display reliquary in Constantinople, as it is shown in many representations, of which the best is the magnificent miniature on the codex Rossiano greco 251 of the Vatican Apostolic Library: the Face seems to be inserted in a kind of rectangular container that has the very dimensions of a towel, more long than broad, and this container has an opening in the centre that allows only the sight of the Face of Jesus, separated from the neck and from the rest of the body. In the icon of Templecombe, this opening that shows the human features of Jesus and separates them from the cover, is an elegant geometric four-leaf-clover motif widely appreciated in the east, and used by Byzantines at least since the ninth century. [26]

The Templars' mysterious idol, then, was nothing more in and of itself than a portrait of Jesus Christ, of a most unusual type; but in the mess of interrogations, tortured or even only terrified by inquisitors, many monks ended up describing anything that could somehow resemble that strange male head on which the torturers wanted information at all costs. It was a portrait that followed an Eastern iconography, imported from Constantinople but little known in Europe, and it was present in many commands of the order in different forms: as an icon painted on wood, as a bas-relief, as a linen cloth which however bore the representation of the whole body. The last of these was only seen by a few

monks in southern France: it did not look like a painting, but rather an image with ill-defined limits, and monochromatic. This was an absolutely peculiar kind of portrait, impossible to understand for anyone who was not aware of certain facts: it represented Christ in a tragically human dimension, enormously distant from that of the Risen Saviour to which the Templars were used. And everything suggests that the leaders of the Order had good reasons of their own to keep its existence secret.

A Physical Icon

Ian Wilson argues that the Shroud, folded so as to show only the image of the face, had actually been an object once owned by the Eastern Roman emperors, and considered as one of the most precious and venerable icons of Christianity: an authentic image of Jesus' face, reproducing faithfully its physiognomy. Stolen during the terrible sack of Constantinople in April 1204, the priceless relic ended up in the hands of the Templars, who kept worshipping it in its original container but preferred to keep silent about its existence, since it had reached them by less than clear methods. [27] The next pages will follow Wilson's reconstruction in its essential lines, but I thought it necessary to discuss several points over again and open a few new parentheses, to make the context clearer.

There was a very long theological tradition connecting this portrait closely to the Gospels and to the life of Christ; in a way we might say that to many authoritative theologians of the ancient world that object was almost a manifesto of Christianity itself. [28] In the ancient town of Edessa, present-day Urfa in Turkey, there was worshipped an image of Jesus on a cloth that was said not to have been made by human hands (acheropita); the portrait, always called mandylion (in Greek, "hand towel" or "handkerchief"), was the holiest of objects to the local Christian community. In 943, the emperor Romanus I Lecapenus sat on the throne of Byzantium, and just in that year the city was celebrating an especially important anniversary. One hundred years before, in 843, an important Imperial decree had finally outlawed and declared heretical the theological current called Iconoclasm, literally "image-smashing", which had been favoured by several previous Emperors over a matter of decades, and which had destroyed through religious fanaticism an incalculable amount of works of art. The iconoclasts, the image-smashers, based their views on an interpretation of Jesus Christ that was not the one defined by the Council of Nicaea of 325, which had fixed the Christian statement of faith. The Nicene creed stated that Jesus was

true man and true God, that he bore in himself both a human and a divine nature; but the iconoclasts were monophysites, from the Greek monophysis or "one nature"; according to their view, the human nature of Jesus, mortal and base, had been absorbed and taken into the divine one, eternal and infinitely superior. The Christ, that is, had only one nature, the divine one. Like God in all things, Jesus was not to be represented visually, because it was not legitimate to represent God; hence all his images were to be destroyed. On 25 March 717, Leo III Isauricus was crowned Eastern Roman Emperor. He had reached the throne from the army, having previously been the commander of the great unit of Anatolia. Leo was of Syrian origin and had took with him from his native country a certain tendency to look with suspicion on image-worship, for it could contain the seeds of idolatry, which Christians and other Eastern peoples had always been concerned to avoid. When he became familiar with the usages of Constantinople, Leo III realised that the cult of images had taken a fundamental role even in liturgy, and had practically become one of the main forms of Byzantine religiosity. That hurt the sensibilities of some extreme theologians, who saw Christianity as a spiritual religion and therefore condemned the cult given to images, which are objects made of matter. Leo III embraced this doctrine, but his choice made the public hostile to him; on 19 January 729, some fanatics even defaced one of the capital's most famous icons of Christ, and the people rose in revolt, which Leo III had bloodily suppressed. This also led to a break in relationships with the Church of Rome, led in those years by Popes Gregory II (715-731) and his successor Gregory III (731-743): both believed that the human nature of the Christ deserved without any doubt to be represented and worshipped by the faithful through the contemplation of sacred art. [29] In actual fact, the worship of images was rooted in a very ancient tradition, going back to the very beginnings of the Church. In the fourth century AD, bishop Athanasius of Antioch extolled the images of Jesus by quoting the Gospel passage in which Christ had said: "He who has seen me, has seen the Father"; therefore, owning faithful portraits of Jesus was a patrimony for the Christian community, and to contemplate his human form could be a valid help in prayer. [30] Not much later, St. Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea (330-379 AD), the founder of a monastic movement that spread all over the East, had written a work titled A Treatise on the Holy Spirit in which he explained this theological concept with a very effective example. According to St. Basil, when the subjects pay homage to the statue of their Emperor, the affection and admiration they bear goes from the statue to the person of the Emperor himself; so too the cult that Christians offer to the portrait of Christ is aimed to the Person of Jesus, that is, it is not idolatrous. In another work, St. Basil maintained that the images of martyrs are

able to drive demons off, an idea shared with his brother St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, according to whom representations of saints induce the faithful to imitate them: therefore "the silent pictures painted on church walls can in fact talk, and are of great advantage".[31]

But probably the most passionate defender of image worship was the monk John of Damascus (about 650 -749 AD), one of the most brilliant minds in 2,000 years of Christian history. He had lived in Syria when it was ruled by Muslim Arabs, and paradoxically this had left him free to express his religious views with much greater freedom than his brother monks living under the power of Constantinople: for the Arabs forced Christians to pay a special tax, after which they were free to follow their own cult without their rulers meddling in dogmatic issues. John's Treatise on Images described these practices of devotion with great theological subtlety and a most agile, even poetic language: in a word, he had been able to reflect the warm love borne by the common people to the most important representations of Christ, of the Virgin, and of the saints. John of Damascus started from a very simple truth, which everyone could understand: to the Christian believer, Jesus was also a terrestrial, concrete and material reality. In his life, he had walked through the roads of Palestine, and his feet had left their prints in that sandy land; after his death and resurrection, through the power of the Spirit, Christ went on living and acting in the lives of his faithful, as he had promised in the Gospel of Matthew: "Behold, I am with you all days, until the ending of the world".[32]

The portrait of Jesus preserved by tradition symbolises and reminds the Christian of this physical, daily and terrestrial presence, and that contact is the greatest comfort in the difficulties of life. This opportunity of a personal relationship could not be taken from the people in the name of a very abstract piece of reasoning. It was not right; besides, that strange view of faith promoted by certain ultra-refined thinkers was not even close to the original dictates of the Gospels, which had clearly stated that even after his resurrection, Jesus had a concrete and tangible body that could be seen and touched. According to John of Damascus, Jesus is a "physical icon" of the Father (*èikon physikè*), a living image full of Holy Spirit and capable of bringing man closer to God by purifying his soul and thoughts. [33]

"Et habitavit in nobis"

In the early eighth century, the theological line that extolled the spiritual value of

icons found a strenuous supporter in the monk Theodore, abbot of the monastery of Studion in Constantinople, one of the most splendid centres of Byzantine culture. Theodore the Studite was able to fight both intellectually and politically to reassert the need to worship images: if man had been created in the image of God, then surely there was something divine in the art of making sacred images. With amazing insight, he was able to underline a perennially valid, timeless fact: forbidding the cult of images can be very dangerous, for it lays the groundwork for the growth of heresies. Rejecting images in the name of a religion made only of ideas, of mental concepts, prevents contact between the faithful and the human aspect of Jesus: this leaves the faithful exposed to the ever-lurking danger of taking Jesus Christ as nothing but a spiritual entity, a symbol of the possible contact between man and God. Jesus, though, was also a concrete flesh-andbones person; it was nothing but his human suffering that have brought about the redemption of others: "As a perfect Man, Christ not only can but must be represented and worshipped in images; deny this, and the whole economy of salvation in Christ is virtually destroyed". [34]

Theodore's thought triumphed in the great Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea of 787. At the centre of debate was placed, exactly, the *mandylion*, the most ancient and venerated image of Christ. The term used to describe it is "print" (character), the same used for coining money: the word describes the negative image formed thanks to the contact of an object. The Council of Nicaea was also highly concerned with the precise regulation of the role of images in the life of the Church, so that their cult should not issue in the end in the sin of idolatry: it specified that it was forbidden to worship them, for worship belongs exclusively to God, but it recommended a carefully balanced honouring. It insisted that God is certainly not a matter for images: faith is born from Scripture, that is the Word of God, and nobody must ever feel at ease with his conscience for the fact alone of being devoted to a sacred image, whichever it is. Sacred representations have essentially an educational function, useful to make dogmas somehow accessible to the majority of the faithful with insufficient cultural resources; furthermore, they belong to the Christian tradition, which is itself venerable and a carrier of truth. For all these reasons, there was a detailed settlement of the kind of liturgy to be followed when holy icons were venerated, the same used for relics: it was based on kissing, lighting lamps and *proskinesis*, kneeling with one's forehead to the ground, still in use today among Muslims. That was how the Christians of the Holy Land venerated the relic of the true Cross, and the same did the Templars with their "idol", prostrating themselves

with their faces to the ground: certainly, in 14th century Europe this practice must have left the curious astonished.[35]

The achievement of the Council of Nicaea was the theology of the icon, which is still in place and widely popular to this day: an icon is not merely a portrait of Jesus or of other characters in sacred history, but rather a place of the Spirit, a sanctuary in itself, approaching which the faithful step with one foot in the dimension of the divine. Contemplation of the icon is communication with God. Only a few people are allowed to paint icons, and they must follow a very ancient ritual governed by cast iron rules, because the result must be faithful to traditional models. Everything begins with a period of fasting and spiritual purification that the painter is obliged to undergo before he so much as starts the work, and it ends with the addition of the writings: they can only be done by using a liturgical language. The writing seals the truth of the portrait to its original and declares that what can be seen with human eyes is verily and indeed present, and takes part in the heavenly liturgy. Of course these captions that appear on icons are subject to absolutely fixed rules established by Church doctrine. Some cannot be touched: no painter was allowed to alter them even with the consent of a bishop or of a patriarch, because they had been studied to render synthetically certain unarguable dogmas of religion. The first and probably the most ancient is the one shortened as IC-XC, which refers to the image of Jesus and is formed by the first and last letters of the Greek words IHCOYC XPICTOC, "Jesus Christ". It appears in icons as early as the ninth century, and contains in itself a whole confession of faith – that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah (in Greek, exactly, *christòs*) awaited for centuries by the people of Israel, that was the first, essential, untouchable truth of Christianity, the basis itself on which the Church had been built. [36] Possibly the second most ancient and widespread motto was the one that accompanied the image of Mary, MP-TY: it stood for MHTHP TEOY, "Mother of God", and it was also obviously the codification in a simple form of a dogma. It came from the Council of Ephesus of 431, in whose sessions had raged a furious debate exactly because this title, born among the ordinary people and used from time out of mind, had been placed in doubt. Bishop Nestorius, who held the important office of Patriarch of Constantinople, wanted to change Mary's title from theotòkos ("mother of God") to christotòkos, that is "mother of Christ": for in his view the Virgin had given birth to the human nature of Jesus, but it could not be possible that a young woman, herself a created thing, could possibly give birth to the divine nature of Jesus, that is to the Logos, that was immensely superior to her.

Nestorius' proposal did not at all go down well with theologians such as St.

Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, because in practice it amounted to breaking in two parts – one weaker and the other perfect – the unity of the Person of Jesus Christ. Even less did it please the commons: tradition had it that it was just to Ephesus that the Apostle John had taken Mary, entrusted by Jesus on the cross to his care. The people were long used to honouring her as Mother of God: all those abstruse reasonings they neither understood nor wanted to understand. The proposal to downgrade the Virgin from "Mother of God" to "Mother of Christ" was rejected under a hail of excommunications, and the city was lit up as if for a festival. The bishops who had defended the traditional title of *theotòkos* were escorted to their homes by a solemn procession with torches and incense smoke, as if they were themselves icons of saints.[37]

The expression *Jesus Christ* (in Greek, *Ièsus Christòs*) on the other hand was never challenged, because it was too ancient, too vital, and too central. The Gospels took it back to the time itself of Jesus' preaching: one day the Nazarene had asked his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" Peter had eventually answered: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." That had been the first Christian profession of faith, synthetic but complete. In the circle of the first Christians, what today's exegetes and theologians call the "post-Paschal Church", already a very short time before the death and the events that followed, the two words *Jesus* (a very widespread man's name) and *Christ* (a sacred adjective) had become indissoluble, one and the same.[38]

In March of 843, the empress Theodora, widowed from a husband who had once more persecuted the defenders of images, made a wholly opposite choice and established a solemn ceremony, the Feast of Orthodoxy, meant to remember for ever the final victory of the holy icons.[39] And in the year 943, first centenary of the Feast, the emperor Romanus I decided to solemnise that anniversary by taking into the capital city of the empire the most famous and venerated of all images of Christ, the one kept in Edessa; he therefore entrusted the recovery mission to the best of his generals, John Curcuas. The town was then held by the Arabs, and Curcuas was forced to negotiate the handover of the mandylion. In exchange for this single object, the Byzantine emperor set free 200 high-ranking Muslim prisoners, paid 12,000 gold crowns, and furthermore gave the city a guarantee of perpetual immunity. After long examinations – for the Arabs had tried to stick the general with a fake – the famous image was taken into Constantinople on 15 August, the day of the Dormition of Mary, in a memorable procession, and placed in the church of the Blachernae, dedicated to the Virgin. The following day it was placed on an imperial ship on which it sailed around the city, being finally placed in the imperial chapel of Pharos. This inaccessible sanctuary was a colossal reliquary, where the emperors had been

collecting for centuries all the most precious relics of the lives of Jesus, of the Virgin and of the saints. Several mediaeval visitors who had been allowed in, and had been able to contemplate the collection, stated that the collected objects included all the relics of the Passion, from the bread consecrated in the Last Supper to the sponge with which the soldiers had offered Jesus vinegar, apart from a number of other important memories; the long result of a centuries-old campaign of tooth-comb searches that had started as early as Helena, mother of Constantine. [40] This patient, continuously and wildly expensive operation is easily explained: since at a certain point in history contact with the Holy Land had become difficult, it was necessary to keep in any situation a physical and concrete relationship with the testimonies of Christ's life. Within barely four years (636-640 AD) the Arabs, led by Caliph Omar tore from the emperors of Byzantium most of Lesser Asia, including the region of Syria and Palestine; from that moment on, visits to the Holy Sepulchre and to the other Holy Places only became possible under special diplomatic agreements between the court of Constantinople and their new masters, and at any rate it was impossible to stop the basilica of Anastasis itself, where the Sepulchre was, from being utterly devastated. So they studied ways to transfer everything from the life of Jesus that could possibly be moved away, so as to create a new Jerusalem on the Bosporus, with all the fundamental proofs. In 1201 the imperial guardian of relics, Nicholas Mesarites, had to defend the great Byzantine sanctuary from the danger of looting when a palace revolution was trying to seize power; he managed to calm the spirits of rebels because he told them that that chapel was an utterly sacred place, a new Holy Land to honour and respect beyond any political issue:

This temple, this place, is a new Sinai; it is Bethlehem, Jordan, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethany, Galilee, Tiberias; it is the basin, the Supper, Mount Tabor, the praetorius of Pilate, the Place of the Skull called in Hebrew Golgotha. Here Christ was born, here was He baptized, here did He walk on water and here He has walked on the land, He made wonderful miracles and lowered Himself to washing feet [...] Here He was crucified, and those who have eyes can see the rest for His feet. Here he was also buried, and the rolled stone by his grave bears witness to it to this day. Here he rose again, and the shroud with the grave-linens prove it to us. [41]

After being transferred to the capital, the *mandylion* remained in

Constantinople and soon became the symbol itself of the city, a kind of supreme protector that featured even on the army's standards; the Byzantine religious mind identified it with the Eucharist; that is with the Body of Christ, and reproduced it in countless copies. From then on, the Byzantine world developed a great passion for the physical features of Jesus: it was a bit like reacting against centuries of a culture that had for so many different reasons ignored if not even refused it. Through the study of relics they had worked out how tall he was: outside the Hagia Sophia cathedral they had erected a life-size reproduction of the Cross, called "Cross of the measure" (*crux mensuralis*), which allowed everyone to envisage him as he was.[42]

The imperial collection at Pharos filled with testimonies of every kind, including some (like the nappies of Baby Jesus or the milk of the Virgin) that make us smile today; but this must not make us forget the huge historical value of their presence. It had certainly not been ignorant peasants who had wanted them there and made them precious, but the greatest intellectuals of their times. There was something like a sense of deep emotion in rediscovering this human dimension of Jesus, something that the Eastern Christian world had neglected for centuries. After all, the absolute novelty of Christianity was that God had come to walk among ordinary people: the Greek text of the gospel of John says literally: "the Word was made flesh, and pitched his tent among us".[43] To contemplate Baby Jesus' nappies was to be reminded that Christ had been a newborn baby like everyone else, and that Mary, whom the Byzantines called the Mother of God, had looked lovingly after him just as other mothers did with their children. Some objects show that God looks after man from close by, and is within his reach. And those of the Passion also had another thing to say: there is surely something of the divine in the sick, the dying the person crushed by suffering – in the faces of all those whose faces, in the adversities of life, can be superimposed on that unrecognisable face of Christ.

The transfer of the *mandylion* to the capital was a memorable event, during which a considerable amount of writings was produced. The study of all these sources proves of special interest: for the description of the *mandylion* and of its history, as narrated in the days of Constantine VII, does not quite agree with what we know from the oldest sources. Several different things appear in it: details that seem custom made to "update" the legend in the light of a new and disconcerting truth.

In 1997, the Roman historian Gino Zaninotto noticed that inside a 10th century Greek manuscript of the Vatican Apostolic Library there was preserved a solemn speech written by Gregory the Referendarius, the archdeacon of the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople who looked after the relationship between the Emperor and the Patriarch. Gregory went himself to Edessa in John Curcuas' mission to recover the *mandylion* in 944 and carefully investigated the city archives looking for the ancient documents telling the story of the image; he then wrote this homily, in which he celebrated the relic's importance and gave a synthetic account of its history. The Referendarius' account was thus far unpublished, one of many unknown treasures in the Pontiffs' library, and it was published by Byzantine scholar André-Marie Dubarle in the specialist periodical *Révue des Études Byzantines*.[44]

According to archdeacon Gregory, the image is in fact an imprint, and is beautified by the drops of blood that fell from Christ's wounded side: precedent tradition usually described the *mandylion* as a small piece of linen, as large as a hand-towel, as the name itself implies, which bore the only imprint in existence of the face of Jesus. But the homily of codex *Vaticanus Graecus 511* describes it as an imprint showing the chest with the mark of the spear and the flow of blood that had issued from that wound, that is, there was an image of the body at least from the waist up. According to the most ancient tradition, the *mandylion* had nothing to do with the death of Christ: it was simply his portrait when alive. The first records of this legend spoke of an exchange of letters between Jesus and Abgar King of Edessa, identified as Abgar V the Black; the sovereign had heard stories of Jesus' great fame as healer, he knew that he was being sought to be killed, and so had a messenger to offer him a safe refuge in his city.

Eusebius of Caesarea, the very learned bishop who was Constantine the Great's spiritual adviser, inserted the episode in his *Church History*, but with no mention of any image. In fact, this may well be due to Eusebius' own intervention, selecting from tradition only what he appreciated, and eliminating (or simply ignoring) what struck him as less worth sharing. We know that the bishop of Caesarea was strongly opposed to image-worship. There is a famous letter of his to Empress Constantia, who had heard that some Christian groups owned the true portrait of Jesus of Nazareth and asked the bishop to use his influence to let her have a copy. His answer was an undiplomatic, unmitigated reproof:

And yet if thou now declarest that thou askest me not for the image of the human form turned to God, but the icon of His mortal flesh, just as it was before His Transfiguration, then I answer: knowest thou not the passage where God commands that no image should be done of anything up in the heavens or down on earth?[45]

Such an attitude may strike us as over-cerebral, indeed unpleasant; but we must try to put ourselves in those people's shoes and watch carefully the realities of their time. Eusebius was certainly no unbeliever, but both a great theologian and most devout person: his basic concern was to ward off the danger of idolatry, a risk which Christians felt to be most serious and ever lurking. In the Roman Empire it was a widespread custom to make realistic portraits of the dearly departed, and the tablets found in the necropolis of Fayyum in Egypt show that they worked hard to make these portraits as close to the original as possible; many are so accurate that they seem like photographs. The monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai preserves a couple of superb icons from the age of Emperor Justinian (527-565) representing Jesus and Saint Peter, which clearly come from this very tradition of Roman imperial-age portrait. Even a layman can tell that they are drawn from realistic portraits: the icon of Peter bears on top three round frames which hold the portraits of Saint John (shown as a young man of about 15), then Jesus and Mary, whose facial features are strikingly similar.[46] From the earliest days, Christians used to keep portraits of Jesus, and also of Peter and Paul, in their homes, but Eusebius did not approve: for many Christians were freshly converted from paganism on account of Constantine's religious policy, and tended to worship these images no differently from the pagan idols they had worshipped until shortly before then. Christianity required a total change of mentality, of the way to look at the world, and that could hardly be done in a few months. Meanwhile, as long as the neophytes had not developed a wholly Christian conscience, it was wiser to break altogether away with what had been part of their old pagan cult. Following this reasoned judgment, Eusebius preferred not to have realistic figures of Christ at all, only ideal and symbolic figurations. Maybe for the same reason, Christian art from centuries I-IV preferred not to portray Jesus, but rather represent him by symbols (the fish, the anchor), by particular figures that hearkened back to the parables (the Good Shepherd), or again as a young god like Apollo, impersonally and perfectly beautiful, with a beauty that has nothing to do with the portraiture of an individual. [47]

Around the year 400, the legend of Abgar reappeared in a new version, inside an unknown author's text called *The Doctrine of Addai*: besides writing a letter to Jesus, according to this tale, King Abgar had sent him a painter who was able to make a very faithful portrait, "picked out in marvellous colours"; then, about a hundred years later, Armenia's historian Moses of Korene spoke of the *mandylion* as of an image painted on a silk curtain. In the course of the sixth century, and particularly when Edessa suffered a Persian conquest, people began to speak of the *mandylion* no longer as of a painter's portrait, but as of an *acheropita*, an image made not by human hands but by miracle; according to the Byzantine historian Evagrius, who lived in that period, the people of Edessa thought it a relic of immense power and used it in certain rituals thanks to which they had been saved from the enemies.[48]

It was only with the expedition of General John Curcuas under Romanus I in the year 943, and the transfer of the image to Constantinople, that the *mandylion*'s tradition started to be filled with references to the Passion of Christ. These references were very clear, yet there was a clear attempt to gloss over them in embarrassment: clearly they had found out that the image of Jesus on cloth was the image of a dead Jesus, a detail of no small importance which tradition had left unmentioned. Gregory the Referendarius and Curcuas the general had gone to Edessa with an army to bring back to their homeland a truthful picture of Jesus of immense fame; what they surely expected was an effigy of "Christ Pantocrator", the mighty Lord of the Universe, smiling and bless the faithful from the shining gold of the mosaics on the wall of great churches: an image on whose pattern the Emperor of Constantinople had been represented since the days of Justinian, and in a way since Constantine had been celebrated as Christ's Vicar on Earth and equal to the Apostles. [49] Gregory the Referendarius and John Curcuas expected to see the portrait of a divinely handsome face, a portrait of a living Jesus capable of developing the most profound sense of majesty, such as pertains only to the Lord of the World and his earthly follower, the Emperor. Instead they were faced with the frightful imprint of a dead man, the corpse of a man killed by the cross, with his whole body tormented with wounds. There was blood on the *mandylion*: not a few drops here and there, but a vast flood, as visible as what can come out of a human chest torn open. Instead of the King of Kings, they met in Edessa the Man of Sorrows. Nothing could have been further from the glory of the Byzantine Emperor than that pitiful view, almost the very symbol of mankind defeated by suffering and by death. And yet the *mandylion* had an ineffable quality the sources don't describe for us, and that something gave the two officials the nerve to appear before the Emperor with an object so radically different from anything that had

been expected. The documents telling of its arrival contain curious details, hard at first to understand: the children of the Emperor Romanus look at the relic but cannot distinguish the details, while his son-in-law Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who was to inherit the throne, immediately sees every detail and feels an immense emotion. What does that mean? When compared with the Shroud of Turin, as Ian Wilson wishes, this account seems very credible, because it is well known that the image of the Shroud has the curious optical property already mentioned: it is visible only if one stands at least two metres from it, but swiftly vanishes when one tries to get closer. It is my own personal view that there is something more to be read there: that is, that Constantine VII can see the image because he can accept it as it is: for a special reason, unlike so many of his contemporaries before him, he can appreciate a portrait of Christ with the unmistakable signs of suffering and death. Discovering the mandylion's "true identity" was surely a shock, and also raised the delicate issue of explaining and justifying how tradition seemed to have kept it hidden behind the notion of a simple portrait; nonetheless Gregory the Referendarius certified it as authentic, for he was sure that the Emperor would have welcomed it with great satisfaction, even after he had discovered the incredible news. Romanus I had had a long hard struggle against Paulicians and other heretical groups that sprang up here and there throughout the Empire and exploited religious ideas to challenge the imperial authority. Paulicians and other sects of the same kind derived their beliefs from the ancient Gnostic heresy that had spread great confusion in the first centuries of the Christian era, especially among eastern churches. Though divided into separate groups that followed different Gospels, Gnostics had in common one strong belief: Jesus had not really been a man of flesh and bone, but a pure spirit, a kind of angel who appeared on earth who did not possess a human body but only a human appearance. The Christ was both a symbol and a celestial messenger who had become manifest among men to teach them how to reach the knowledge of God (in Greek, *qnòsis*); and once his mission had been accomplished, he had returned to his original dimension. According to the Gnostics, the Christ had never been incarnated, had never suffered Passion, had never died, and of course, he had never been resurrected.[50] The Emperor Romanus I had understood that a religious struggle could not only be fought by armed power, but that a confrontation on the level of ideas was also necessary. Even the famous *mandylion* of tradition could have helped refute the heretics, since it was a realistic portrait of the face of that Christ of whom they said that he had never had a real human body; this weird, disquieting object from Edessa also showed him in the form of a dreadfully human nature, a stunning and agonized realism. Owning his funeral shroud with all the marks of the Passion,

to the point of being soaked with the flow of blood from his ribs, meant proving to the whole world that the heretics preached a falsehood.

Gregory the Referendarius was a regular at Romanus' court because of his diplomatic duties, and he certainly knew the mind and attitudes of the whole imperial family. He was a diplomatist and an expert in politics; he judged that the relic could also be a most powerful weapon in the ideological struggle against the proliferating heresies, and at least a few of Romanus I's relatives was sure to appreciate it. It was a smart decision: within a few months, young Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus rose to the Imperial throne of Byzantium and made the *mandylion* the most worshipped and celebrated object in the whole Empire.

It is in fact during this man's very long reign that Byzantine religious thinking experienced a remarkable development, which placed to the forefront in both liturgy and theology the figure of the suffering Christ, the dead body tormented by the Passion, whereas before it had extolled practically only the risen one, shining with glory. They also introduced a new piece of liturgical apparel called epitàphios, a cloth bearing the embroidered or painted image of Christ in the Sepulchre before the Resurrection, with its hands joined over the pubis just as they are seen in the Shroud of Turin.[51] It is very difficult, perhaps even historically impossible, that this change should be independent from what they had just discovered about the nature of the *mandylion*. What could be seen on the cloth once unfolded impressed contemporaries so strongly as to stimulate theological research towards hitherto unexplored directions, so powerful as to change the religious sensitivities of a world. Byzantium rediscovered the Crucifix as the image of a man annihilated by the violence of other men, naked, bloodied, his head fallen down on a no longer breathing chest. For centuries they had represented him with the open eyes of a living man and with a serene face showing no hint of pain, often even richly dressed in purple and wearing a golden diadem instead of a crown of thorns. For nearly a thousand years the faithful had worshipped the illogical image of an emperor in sumptuous dress, finding himself near the cross almost by chance, majestic and impossible; in the end, even without having to drift into heresy, the idea that the Chosen of God could be executed like a common criminal had trouble being accepted. Now, however, the theologians looked to a new dimension of the faith, and mystics found themselves weeping at the wounds of Jesus. [52]

Four times double

Once this new reality with its valuable political aspects was accepted, the problem remained not to make gaping breaks with tradition: the ancient tale of the mandylion could hardly be discarded and on the other hand there was no desire to renounce what had just been newly discovered. In 944 an anonymous intellectual at the court of Constantine VII, or possibly even the Emperor himself, who was a talented writer, wrote a new version of the legend of Abgar. The ancient tale was preserved, but the miraculous formation of the icon was now set exactly during the Passion: no wonder, then, if the linen cloth of the mandylion showed thick drops of blood. The new version had a very sick Abgar resolving to send to Jesus a messenger of his, one Ananias, who also happened to be a painter; Jesus cannot go to Edessa because his mission in Jerusalem is coming close to its fulfilment, so he decides to let Ananias paint his portrait for the King to have. Ananias tries desperately to render his features and fails, because that Face seemed to change mysteriously in shape; then Jesus, touched and wishing to help the ailing King, takes a handkerchief and, on his way to Golgotha, rubs it over his face, so that his features remain miraculously impressed. An interesting and possibly not casual coincidence: a magnificent Byzantine miniature from the 14th century represents the arrival of the mandylion in Constantinople, and the Emperor Constantine VII receives from Gregory the Referendarius, not a simple towel, but a very long cloth where can be seen the image of the Holy Face.

The new version of the legend of Abgar sought to reconcile as much as possible the discrepancies between the tangible form of the *mandylion*, bearing the imprint of a man with his chest torn by a spear-blow, and the older tradition, which made of it only a realistic portrait for which Jesus had sat while alive.[53] The result is naïve and hardly believable: Jesus is staggering towards Golgotha, surrounded by mocking soldiers who will not let anyone near him, and those are the conditions in which he would have a towel handed to him to be able to leave his portrait to the King's envoy. At that time the image was supposed to have formed by miracle; but the spear-thrust that can be seen on the *mandylion* was only inflicted later, after Jesus had died on the Cross. That it was judged acceptable to manipulate the story to this extent surely has an important historical significance. What meaning does this curious contradiction have?

Ian Wilson has noticed that as early as the Doctrine of Addai, the *mandylion* was described by a strange adjective, *tetràdiplon*, that is to say "folded double four times". It is an adjective that cannot possibly make sense if the *mandylion*

had really been a piece of linen the size of a towel or of a handkerchief: once that had been folded eight times, what would be visible would be smaller than a school notebook, and could not allow anyone to see anything. When folded in eight parts, as the ancient sources describe the *mandylion*, the Shroud of Turin takes exactly the appearance of a towel, and all that can be seen is the imprint of the face alone. Linen, if kept long enough folded in the same way, will keep its imprint in the shape of slight deformations that can be seen very well by a grazing, sideways light source: the Shroud keeps the marks of these ancient foldings, and among them there is precisely an eightfold one which, once completed, shows only the face just as it appears in ancient reproductions of the *mandylion*.[54]

Therefore, Ian Wilson feels that in Edessa the cloth was kept in an eightfold form and concealed inside a wooden case covered by a textile covering which bore on its front an opening through which the head alone could be seen. It was a reliquary, but at the same time also a kind of mask designed to show only the most indispensable features, and above all conceal the most striking bloodstains, which it left inside. We are allowed to have a fairly clear idea of the form of this case, which bore decorations similar to those of royal clothes in ancient Turkey: according to Ian Wilson, it was Abgar V himself, or else one of his descendants, who prepared this purpose-made reliquary to disguise the real nature of the object and make it seem a towel.[55]

This trick was probably thought up because the Edessa region was rife with Monophysite ideas, and tended to see Jesus as a being of wholly and only divine nature: an image showing him as a corpse riddled with wounds would have seemed disgraceful, and risked even being destroyed. One of the finest representations of the *mandylion* can be found in the manuscript *Rossiano Greco 251* of the Vatican Apostolic Library, and presents it curiously twice over in a peculiar manner, as if it were the negative imprint of a positive real object. This expensive Codex was made in Constantinople in the 12th century, and at that time the theology of icons had triumphed long since, even so, a vandal's hand has ripped into the magnificent Byzantine miniature. This tells us much about the long survival of a certain kind of bitter hostility against the cult of images.

Once it had been triumphantly placed as the central and most precious part of the imperial collection of relics, the *mandylion* was not touched again even by the Emperor himself, and its obstension only took place rarely and in special circumstances. The sanctuary of Pharos chapel was inviolate, its security aweinspiring. Experience taught that it had to be defended both from the greed of potential thieves and from the fanaticism of believers. After Helena, the mother of Constantine, had rediscovered the pieces of the True Cross in Jerusalem, these

relics used to be freely exhibited to the faithful, who could touch and kiss them without protection; but it was soon realised that this freedom needed limitation, since a pilgrim pretending to kiss the Cross managed to bite off a bit of wood. Sometimes, during ceremonies of particular solemnity, the Emperor could grant some illustrious guest, ambassador or head of State, the supreme honour of a visit to the chapel of Pharos; a privilege certainly granted in 1171 to Amaury, the King of Jerusalem, when he visited the court of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, according to the chronicle of William of Tyre, while an Arab writer called Abu Nasr Yahya had been able to see the *mandylion* exhibited in Hagia Sophia during a solemn procession in 1058.[56]

The original container made in Edessa was probably preserved, to judge by the many artistic reproductions, but it is possible that at some point the Emperors may have chosen to have an identical copy of the Shroud's face to place in this ancient reliquary, so as to be able to exhibit the Shroud wholly open, for the purpose of showing the whole picture of the body; in fact, many ancient authors describe a shroud in Constantinople's imperial collection that looks much like that of Turin, and speak of it and of the *mandylion* as of two different objects. This however might have a very simple explanation. According to some Byzantine sources, the usual place for the *mandylion* was the imperial chapel at Pharos, where it was kept together with another famous relic: the keramion, that is the tile which, in the city of Edessa, closed the hideout where the miraculous icon of Jesus had been kept for a long time. According to tradition, the image of Christ's face had been miraculously impressed on the tile's terracotta, so the keramion had also been taken to Constantinople to be exhibited to the veneration of the faithful; placed one next to the other, the two relics formed an impressive whole that focused minds on the Passion. But the Flemish crusader Robert de Clari, the last witness who ever saw the shroud before the great looting, describes a peculiar ceremony of obstension:

Among these is also a monastery called Our Lady of Blahernae, where is found the shroud wherein Our Lord was shrouded: all [Good] Fridays, it is raised wholly upright so that the figure may be seen. Nobody, neither Greek nor French, knows what happened to this shroud when the city was conquered. [57]

In the church of the Blachernae, the shroud was opened in a frame thanks to a mechanism that slowly lifted it, so that the faithful could see body of Jesus as though he were slowly and gradually rising from the grave. The cloth, therefore, was earlier kept folded, then very slowly spread out. According to Robert de Clari, the Blachernae ceremony took place every Friday, but it is more likely that he intended to mean only Good Friday rather than every week; his description, together with the other sources, suggests that on special occasions the Shroud-mandylion was removed from its holder in the chapel of Pharos and taken to Blahernae where the faithful could contemplate it, even spread out, in the impressive liturgy of the "ascent" (in Greek anàstasis, "resurrection").[58]

At the present stage of our knowledge it is clear that the Shroud of Turin had once belonged to the Byzantine Emperors, since the descriptions of ancient authors are fairly precise; on the other hand, it is certain that until the time of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos the traditions about the mandylion speak of a head-and-shoulder portrait of Jesus alive, while later – as I will point out shortly - this object is always described as a cloth on which is outlined the image of a full body. At present we have no clear idea how this change could come about; a credible idea suggested by historians is that there was in Edessa an attempt to mask in any possible way the funeral nature of the *mandylion*, because the marks of suffering and death on the figure of Christ might create a scandal that would not be endurable in that particular historical context. But this explanation might be incorrect, or might be accompanied by other issues unknown to us at present. It is evident that we know some moments of the Shroud's millennia of history in detail, while we know nothing of others. To strain to tell its vicissitudes date after date is in my view unhelpful, because it means, over so many stretches, dressing up as ornately as possible incomplete or highly dubious notices; rather, it is wiser to arrange in their place the pieces of the puzzle on which we can rely, waiting for further discoveries to give us other convincing information.

In effect, the religious tradition that went into the making of some icons of the *mandylion* associates this image to Christ dead in the sepulchre, as shown for instance by a superb item in the St. Petersburg Russian State Museum, painted by Prokop Tehirin in the early 1600s: the dead body of Jesus, with his hands joined over the pubis as in the Shroud, arises from the sepulchre, while two angels above him display the *mandylion*, which is not a towel, but a fairly long sheet.[59]

Thanks to public showings and the narratives of foreign ambassadors who had been able to be present at private ones, the fame of the *mandylion* spread as far as the West as early as the 11th century; but in Europe it was never described as a towel and, as soon as it was mentioned, it was a sheet that bore the image of the whole body of Jesus Christ. To the text of a sermon ascribed to Pope Stephen III (768-772 AD), someone added in the 11th century a bit of a speech retailing

the "updated" version of the legend of Abgar with the extra bits added on in Constantine Porphyrogenitus' time:

So, fully to please the sovereign, the mediator between God and men lay the full length of his body over a sheet of snow-white linen; and upon this linen, wonderful to relate or to hear, the most noble form of his face and of his whole body was divinely transfigured, so that to be able to see the transfiguration impressed upon that linen should be enough even for those who had not been able to see the Lord in the flesh.[60]

More or less at the same time, between 1130 and 1141, the monk Orderic Vitalis clearly stated, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, that the *mandylion* of Edessa bore the image of Jesus' whole body:

Abgar reigned as toparch of Edessa. To him did the Lord Jesus send [...] the most precious linen, wherewith he dried the sweat from his face, and upon which the features of the Saviour appear, miraculously reproduced. It showeth to those who behold it the image and proportions of the body of the Lord; [61]

and in *Gervase of Tilbury's Otia Imperialia*, written in 1218, the fact was asserted again:

It has been ascertained, thanks to the story told in ancient documents, that the Lord lay the whole of His body down upon the whitest of linen, and so thanks to divine power there remained impressed on the linen the fairest image not only of the face but also of the body of the Lord.[62]

In 1957, historian Pietro Savio pointed out that a Vatican Library manuscript contained a different testimony, going back to the twelfth century, with an "altered" version of the legend of Abgar. Jesus had written to the king: "If thou

truly desirest to see my face as it physically is, I shall send thee a piece of cloth; know about it that upon it is divinely transferred, not only the image of my face, but of my whole body".[63]

Around 1190, Pope Celestine III received from Constantinople the gift of a luxurious liturgical canopy for use in solemn processions, a masterpiece of sacred art which represented the *mandylion* as a sheet bearing the image of the dead Christ with his hands joined over his pubis; and Gino Zaninotto has recently found in another tenth-century Greek codex a further confirmation that the famous Byzantine relic bore the image of the whole body.[64]

From Byzantium to Lirey?

Ian Wilson believes that the Shroud-mandylion vanished from Constantinople during the terrible sack suffered by the city in the days of the fourth crusade (1204). It remained hidden over long decades, then reappeared in the year 1353 near Lirey, a small town in north-central France: in that year, the knight Geoffroy de Charny, Bearer of the Oriflamme in the army of King John the Good, and widely popular at court, made a gift of the singular relic to the collegiate church he had just founded in the town. The Shroud started being exhibited to popular veneration as the true shroud of Jesus with a series of solemn obstentions that drew the enthusiasm of the faithful and the jealousy of the local bishop; in the end, after several events, it passed into the hands of the Dukes of Savoy, who had it kept first in their then capital Chambéry, in the sumptuous Sainte-Chapelle of the Ducal Palace, then moved to their new capital Turin, where it is to this day. The link with the Templar order was first suggested to Ian Wilson by the fact that the man who died at the stake together with Jacques de Molay was called Geoffroy de Charny, the exact same name of the owner of the Shroud in Lirey.[65]

Someone objected to this on the ground that the first owner of the Shroud is found named as Geoffroy de Charny, while the surname of the Templar preceptor appears in the various documents naming him in different forms, that is as Charny, but also *Charneyo*, *Charnayo*, *Charniaco*. In the objectors' view, that is, there is a little difference in sound which would be enough to suppose that the two names were different. I take the liberty to reply that in an administration register from the age of King Philip VI of Valois, the surname of the first owner of the Shroud is given in the forms de Charneyo and also *Charni*, *Charnyo* or else *Charniaco*, just as is found in the case of his kinsman Geoffroy,

dead at the stake on 18 March 1314 together with Jacques de Molay. [66]

This kind of hair-splitting on the basis of mediaeval Latin spelling variants can only be fed to someone who has no practice of mediaeval documents. It would work out if our characters had lived in the France of Napoleon or Victor Hugo, that is in a world dominated by printed paper and in a culture which is officially French-speaking.

For mediaeval society things are quite different. The acts of the Templars' trial, like a countless amount of other contemporary documents, were handwritten, which means that it was easy to make small mistakes; but above all, they were composed in Latin by teams of notaries who translated simultaneously into Latin while they heard the witnesses speak in their native language, in this case French. All French surnames did not have Latin forms, and yet the way had to be found to render their often peculiar sounds into Latin; so adaptations were made, and they could well be different from notary to notary.

For this reason we find the same character quoted in quite different forms, whose variety can seem downright ridiculous to us. Jacques de Molay's surname can also be found written as *Malay*, *Molaho* and *Malart*, while the Visitor of the West, Hugues de Pérraud, is also called *Parando*, *Peraudo*, *Penrando*, *Penrado*, *Peraut* but even *Peraldo*, *Paurando* and *Deperando*. In the case of Templar leaders who lived before the trial, the situation can be even more curious: Gilbert Erail's surname is also found written *Roral*, *Arayl*, *Herac*, *Eraclei* and Eraclius, while that of Robert de Sablé turns up as *Sabolio*, *Sabluillio*, *Salburis*, *Sabloel* and *Sabloil*. And this phenomenon is just as common in the registers of mediaeval Popes: in one and the same letter, written by the same notary, it often happens that the same surname is spelled differently. [67] If we are to assess facts within their historical context, I would say that the notaries transcribed the name of Geoffroy de Charny fairly faithfully, indeed better than many other cases.

What we can deduce from the records of the trial against the Templars strengthens Wilson's theory. Geoffroy de Charny belonged to the narrow circle of Jacques de Molay's loyalists, and he was the only *compaignon dou Maistre* reckoned by Nogaret as powerful enough within the Temple to lock him up in the dungeons of Chinon together with the members of the Templar headquarters, the kind of isolation selected for him, and the attempt to keep him from the Pope when the Pope had asked to question them, leads us to suppose that Charny and the others were able to give an important witness. Geoffroy came from a family of knightly rank and had become a Templar in 1269 at the mansion of Étampes, in the diocese of Sens: his ceremony of admission was celebrated by a high Templar officer called Amaury de La Roche, of whom we shall speak later, a

front-rank figure in the Temple, but also very closet to the crown of France. It must have been an important ceremony, since even the preceptor of Paris, Jean le Franceys, left his mansion to attend.

Born about 1250, the knight Geoffroy de Charny was in 1294 in charge of the mansion of Villemoison, in Bourgogne, and one year later, at no more than 45 years old, received the responsibility for the Templar province of Normandy; he had an outstanding career, but it is not only his hierarchic rank that determined power and prestige in the Temple. Templar sources show that this man was always very close to the person of Jacques de Molay; in 1303 he was in the mansion of Marseille, where he witnessed the admission of a young servant of the Grand Master, charged with the care of his harness and horses, who was received by Symon de Quincy, the then supervisor of the sea journeys to *Outremer*. Marseille was France's main port for the East, and both testimonies assert that the monks present at that chapter then left for Cyprus: a norm of the hierarchic statutes forbade preceptors of western provinces from going to *Outremer* except in obedience to a specific order from the Grand Master, so it is certain that Geoffroy de Charny was in that place while travelling with other brothers to reach Jacques de Molay.[68]

There certainly was a strong tie of personal friendship between the Grand Master and Geoffroy de Charny: the chronicle known as the *Continuation of Guillaume de Nangis* remembers that it was only the Preceptor of Normandy who chose to follow Molay to the stake, shouting to the crowds, during the last appeal they had been granted, that the Temple was innocent and had not betrayed the Christian faith. Geoffroy de Charny seemed to be constantly among the most important dignitaries of the Temple. [69]

There is another detail, too. If we look at the trial documents as a whole, we find that the Preceptor of Normandy Geoffroy de Charny was known to his fellow-monks by a nickname connected to his area of origin. Just as we would call someone "the Tuscan" or "the Sicilian", Charny was also called *le berruyer*, which in 14th century French meant "the man from Berry": it is the area known today as *Champagne berrichonne*, which lay in the later Middle Ages pressed between the two great powers, the Count of Champagne and the Duke of Bourgogne. This was exactly the area where the de Charnys lived and prospered, always having to cope with the difficult games forced by the presence of these mighty lords. [70]

The Templar preceptor of Normandy, Geoffroy de Charny and the Bearer of the Oriflamme of France who owned the Shroud in the mid-thirteen hundreds, belonged in all likelihood to the same family, even though the sources don't allow us to check in detail the exact degree of kinship. The De Charnys had connected themselves with the order of the Temple towards the end of the 12th century; in 1170 Guy sold a wood to the Temple, but his sons Haton and Symon, 11 years later, were to donate to the Order 15 arpenta of land, while in 1262 another member of the lineage, Adam, will make a gift to the order of the fief of Valbardin. It is to be noticed that these gifts often were made as "dowries" for a son about to enter the Order. The Templar domain in Charny was only a quarter of a league away from the command. Thanks to the cartulary of Provins we are informed that in 1241 a Templar by the name of Hugues de Charny was living, and he may well be an uncle of the future Preceptor of Normandy. [71]

The family were also concerned (though indirectly) with another event that concerned the Shroud closely: the fourth crusade, with the dreadful sack of Constantinople during which the relic vanished. Count Guillaume de Champlitte, one of the leading barons who took part in the storming of Constantinople and then became Prince of Achaia, sought the hand of Elisabeth of the lineage of Mont Saint-Jean, lords of Charny. Already by the mid-twelfth century the fief of Charny was very closely connected to the de Courtenay family: Peter I de Courtenay, lord of Charny among other fiefs and youngest son of Louis the Fat, King of France, was the father of Peter II de Courtenay, who would become Emperor of Constantinople in 1205; one year after the conquest of the Greek metropolis, a member of the de Courtenay lineage resided in Charny castle. Later, even after the Greeks had recovered the Eastern Empire, the de Charnys kept significant contact with the fiefs they had built up over there; early in the 1300s, the knight Dreux de Charny married the noblewoman Agnès, heir of the Greek lordship of Vostzitza.[72]

Known sources anyway suggest that the family de Charny did not come into the Shroud's possession immediately after the great sack, but many decades later.

The tragedy of the fourth crusade

On 10 October 1202, the army of the fourth crusade sailed from the strand of Venice under the leadership of Marquess Boniface of Montferrat. It was a vast contingent, made up of about 33,000 crusaders, largely of French origin, and about 17,000 Venetians. The strand of the mighty sea power was as far as the French barons with their feudal levies had been able to come; they had been forced to wait far longer than anyone had imagined: apart from sincere intentions to recover Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre, the accounts had been very badly

drawn up, and organisers had ended up with getting in heavy debt with the Republic's dockyards. The shipbuilders had dedicated whole months to the Crusade and now wanted to be paid. So the expedition was being born with a grave weakness: economic interests placed a mighty control over religious ideals, a control that would eventually prove able to stifle them. In previous months, when it had become known that the Crusade was intended to attack Egypt, the Venetians had grown very reluctant to accept it, because they saw no advantage in investing in an idea that would not have been particularly profitable for their city. The Doge kept the delegates waiting no less than two weeks, then made a counter-proposal: Venice would provide the transport ships for the crusaders and one full year's supplies in exchange for costs being covered in advance and the right to a half of what would be conquered. The French barons accepted without delay, showing some considerable naivety. [73]

After stopping in Pola to clear the shore from pirates, on 10 November the fleet attacked Zadar (Zara): that was a grim omen of the future, for the Venetians compelled the army to loot the city, which was Christian but belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary and was a prime target for Venice. They wintered near Zara, the sea being too stormy to risk travelling on; then, when the fair seasons returned, the fleet struck a course towards Corfu. Meanwhile, the other half of the Christian army was waiting in the Holy Land; after Pope Innocent III's call, all the forces of the Christian kingdom had mobilised, and the military orders, the Templars and Hospitallers, had worked out a plan of operation: as soon as it reached the coast of Syria, the army from Europe was to organise an expedition to shore up Christian presence in northern Syria and up to Armenia. Then Egypt would have to be attacked, because that was where the reinforcements to Jerusalem's Muslim masters were coming.[74]

By the spring of 1203, the army was preparing to sail away from Corfu, but a change had been made: the leaders had decided to alter their route and go through Constantinople, the mighty capital of the Greek Empire that stretched on both sides of the Bosporus. Several reasons were mentioned, but the most popular was to do with the sad fate of the legitimate Greek Emperor Isaac II Angelos, who was blinded and overthrown. His son Alexius had escaped to Europe and taken refuge with his sister, who had married Philip of Swabia, the brother of Emperor Henry VI; Philip had then asked for the Crusader troops to make their way to Constantinople and help his brother-in-law Alexius to recover power. It was just a matter of helping the legitimate dynasty, who would then, in gratitude, help the Crusade by placing at its disposal a considerable slice of the Byzantine army. Many lords were not convinced, however, they may have perceived that matters were getting out of hand, and so they abandoned the

expedition and made their way to the Holy Land on their own. [75]

Both the goals and the purpose of the Crusade were already compromised. When the Roman Curia heard of the storming of Zara, Pope Innocent III formally excommunicated the Venetians, guilty of the aggression. But the operation was no longer under the Pope's control and had not been for months: Apostolic Legate Pietro Capuano had been rejected by the Venetians, who no longer accepted him as the Pope's representative because of the excessive distance between his views and theirs. The Cardinal had to go back and eventually reached the Holy Land by himself. On 18 July 1203, the host reached Constantinople. The reasons that had been used for that bizarre detour were no longer valid, since the legitimate Emperor Isaac Angelos, blinded though he had been by his enemies, had been set back on the throne by his own Greek subjects. A few months of peace and quiet broken by occasional episodes of violence: the army had made camp outside the city walls, and the crusaders were inspecting the magnificent capital looking greedily at all its treasures and thinking of potential loot. Some leading figures were invited by young Alexius, crowned Emperor jointly with his father on 10 August 1203, and visited the monumental imperial palace with its inconceivable collection of relics: the French knight Geoffroy de Villehardouin declared in his Chronicle that Constantinople contained as many relics as the whole rest of the world put together. [76]

The debts made with the Venetians hung heavily over the expedition's future. Emperor Alexius tried to bring together what he could, but could only cover half the enormous sum for which he had made himself liable; understanding that the situation was out of control, he went as far as to expropriate the patrimonies of noble families and had church vessels of silver and gold melted down. In August, a Greek mob had assaulted the Latin quarter, taking advantage of the Emperor being out of town, and had set fire to the shops of Venetian, Genoese and Pisan merchants. A few days later, a mob of Flemish, Venetians and Pisans stormed the Muslim quarter and set the mosque on fire. A strong wind drove onward the flames and a whole quarter of Constantinople was destroyed; about 15,000 Latins who were stable residents in Constantinople took refuge with the Crusaders and swelled their ranks. By the end of 1203, the Crusader leaders sent the Emperor an ultimatum: if Alexius did not fulfil his obligations at the earliest, their alliance would have been considered as broken and they would hold themselves to have the right to wage war against him. In January 1204 the imperial official Alexius Murzuphlos overthrew the emperor in a coup; he then caused the crusaders to understand that he did not intend to pay his predecessor's debts and that he meant to chase them out of Byzantine soil. In March, the French barons and the Venetians met to plan the conquest of Constantinople and

the division of the future empire they would conquer once the capital had been forced to surrender. Firstly, Venice had to be compensated for the expenses she had suffered; then the Doge would have had first picks among the loot up to three quarters of the total; they also made the plans for the election of a new emperor, entrusted to a commission of six Frenchmen and six Venetians. The defeated party would have had the right to nominate the future Latin rite patriarch. [77]

In three days of horror, from the 14 to 16 April 1204, Constantinople was subjected to an unprecedented sack, that spared nobody; even the churches were desecrated, even though the expedition that had taken those men to the Bosporus was supposed to follow the flag of religion. The butchery was atrocious, even though Byzantine civilisation later recovered and still had some periods of splendour, the sack of 1204 left a terrible wound and irreparably compromised that union of the Greek and Latin churches that Innocent III so longed for. [78]

The violence and looting were followed by a more systematic stripping of all other treasures in the capital, precious objects that the Crusaders had been able to study in detail in the previous months; Greek monks had tried to make relics and furniture safe, but all their hideouts were discovered. The conquerors had reached a preliminary agreement: the whole booty was to be gathered in the house of Garnier de Traynel, bishop of Troyes, under pain of excommunication; after which it would be properly shared out. It seems that the Doge craftily offered to the French barons an efficient guard service for the small sum of ten marks per person; but this time he had overrated French naivety, and he was politely turned down. Anyway the Venetians were the first to break the pact, taking several precious objects into their ships on the quiet, under cover of darkness – but they weren't the only ones. The official reckoning went on in parallel with a clandestine and wholly autonomous one, which fed a wholly repulsive trade. The notion took hold that to obtain at least one relic would mean to be freed of the vow to go to Jerusalem; they actually thought that once they had got the precious pieces of loot, they would be entitled to turn their backs on the Holy Sepulchre and go home with an easy conscience. Nobody wanted to be left empty-handed, and no sanctuary was spared. The rumour of these unworthy transactions led the IV Lateran Council of 1215 to excommunicate anyone guilty of trafficking in relics. [79]

Individual crusaders found ways to secretly get hold of these eagerly desired objects, intending to take them home to enrich the family churches. In no more than four years, the immense sacred treasury of relics kept in Constantinople was sent to Europe. Crusaders often sent them as gifts to persons from whom they expected favours, or used them as investments: owning an illustrious relic

seemed like an actual guarantee of future earnings, for the faithful were expected to come in crowds to venerate it, taking fat alms with them. That was the expectation that led the crusader Nivelon de Quierzy, bishop of Soissons, to mortgage the future income of an object he owned to rebuild the cathedral and bridge of the French town of Châlons-sur-Marne; the restorations of Troyes cathedral were also paid with the income from some relics donated by bishop Garnier de Traynel, and the same happened in many other cases. When they reached Europe, these relics were expected with great trepidation and were delivered to their addressees in solemn and elaborate religious ceremonies, accompanied by hymns and poems composed for the occasion.[80]

Obviously, the relics from the great imperial collection housed in the chapel of Pharos and in the Blachernae basilica were given special treatment. The whole operation concerning them was carefully recorded in an official report; they were sealed in purpose-made crates to prevent thefts and fraudulent substitutions, which were entrusted to the most trustworthy of carriers. They had a general passport and a certificate of authenticity that guaranteed their origin, a certificate bearing the golden seal of Byzantine emperors. [81]

In 1241 when the Latin Empire of Constantinople, after a long decline, entered into a full-blown economic crisis, the last priceless few relics of the Passion left the capital. They had been acquired by an exceptional buyer, the King of France, Louis IX, a man of great and sincere faith, who had paid out an absolute fortune for them. In the heart of Paris, near Nôtre-Dame cathedral, an exquisite little church, a jewel in and of itself, had been put up for the express purpose of guarding such treasures: the Sainte-Chapelle. Carefully crated up, sealed, certified, and handed over to trustworthy persons, a fragment of the True Cross, the Spear, the Sponge, the Crown of Thorns and a number of other relics of Jesus, sealed in their valuable original reliquaries, moved off towards France. [82]

If the Templars ever held the Shroud, they cannot have failed to know its history and the fact that it had been stolen during a frightful massacre against which Innocent III had flung his curses. The sheet was valuable beyond reckoning, but owning it involved many risks.

More precious than rubies

The theory Ian Wilson offered years ago could close the gap between the Byzantine witnesses of the Shroud before the sack of April 1204 and those

which find it in France about 150 years later. Attractive and based on some credible documentation, it raised some enthusiasm early on, but some scholars also raised serious objections: in effect, the author tended to take as fact certain things that only arose from his own deductions, brilliant and credible though they might be. Over time, the best known experts in Templar history have had a wide range of reactions to Wilson's theory, and after an original stage of prevailing scepticism, it seems to have been cautiously but increasingly re-evaluated.

A few years after the publication of Wilson's book, in 1985, Alain Demurger of the Sorbonne declared himself fairly sceptical, while Malcolm Barber of Cambridge showed himself more open to its possibilities. In a 1982 article on the specialist magazine Catholic Historical Review, Barber assessed Wilson's theory as weakly supported, since not a single one of these mysterious Templar idols has been preserved. The other evidence Wilson had gathered seemed to him to lack a strong connection, amounting in effect to a sequel of scattered and not very coherent fragments. However, Barber had already had a definite impression, during his own analysis of the trial records, that the Templars were actually worshipping some sort of portrait of Christ done in the Byzantine manner. He closed by remarking that the idea seemed possible to him, but still needed a sufficiently strong explanation. [83]

Some time later, Francesco Tommasi of the University of Perugia carried out a broad and extremely detailed research on the relics the Templars had acquired. The Italian historian decided not to study the trial records, which are the most abundant source of evidence about the Templars to have reached us, but a great deal of whose information is vitiated by torture; this left him with a much narrower area of research, but also one that could not be suspected of manipulation. Tommasi discovered that the Order of the Temple had carried out a genuine policy of systematically combing for relics, building up a treasure-store of such objects, which in contemporary culture were of great economic as well as religious value. More than a thousand years earlier, the acts of the martyrdom of Saint Polycarpus (about 165 AD) stated that the bones of its hero could be much more precious than gems. [84] The author certainly meant only a spiritual value, but that was one sentence that was to have an incredible career.

The Templar's favourite way to acquire them was simply to buy them: either they made a straightforward purchase, or else they took relics in pawn against hefty loans made to persons in trouble, loans that never were returned and left the pawn as a Temple property. The Temple had money to spend, and in the matter of relics it was quite happy to spend it.

A very interesting fact pointed out by Tommasi is that the sacred treasury of

the Templars was full of saints worshipped mainly in the Byzantine East, such as Polycarpus of Smyrna, Plato, Gregory, Anastasia, Euphemia; but the central place in this collection was obviously taken by direct testimonies of the Passion of Jesus Christ. The order had owned a great Cross-holder in Jerusalem that held a fairly large fragment of the True Cross, from which had been cut several small bits that had been then sent throughout the Templar world; many Templar commands had their own reliquary with a Cross fragment, which must have represented to the monks a physical link with Christ and the Holy City. The Templars seem to have been more devoted to the Cross than other religious orders, and they offered it special liturgies, both in Syria and later in Cyprus. [85]

The Templar collection's centre piece was a thorn from the Crown of Thorns, which was said to flower miraculously on Good Friday. A curious fact is that when the Hospitallers took over Templar goods after the Order's dissolution, they inherited the Thorn as well, and became used to its annual miracle. On Good Friday of 1497 the Thorn flowered no less than three hours before its usual time of midday, and the Grand Prior Jacques de Milly immediately called for a public notary to make a legal record of that unusual event. The same wonder was recorded by the last Grand Master of the Templars, Jacques de Molay, during the trial, as he testified in defence of his order: God would never have granted a similar miracle to unworthy persons or to heretics. Another important relic was a cross inside a little cup that had belonged to Jesus. Kept by the Templars of Jerusalem, it was borne in procession when drought threatened, to beg God for the gift of rain. According to this evidence, it also had the power to heal the sick and free the oppressed.[86]

Apart from what they owned themselves, the Templars in general were held to have a particular link with relics and were regarded as among the greatest experts in recognising true ones; in fact, when great personages have something to do with relics, it is to the Templars that they turn as to trustworthy and authoritative people. In 1164, Louis VII, King of France, charged the Templar knight Geoffroy Foucher, who was about to travel to Syria, to consecrate a ring of his by placing it physically in touch with the sanctuaries he was to meet during his mission. In 1247, the Patriarch of Jerusalem wanted to send to Europe an ampoule containing some of the Most Precious Blood to be given to King Henry III of England: Grand Master Guillaume de Sonnac of the Temple and Grand Master of the Hospital Guillaume de Chateaunef were summoned to underwrite in person the certificate of authenticity that went with the relic. Thirty years later, Grand Master of the Temple Thomas Bérard and some faithful from the Holy Land sent some particles of the wood of the True Cross to England, along with relics of Saints Philip, Helena, Stephen, Lawrence, Euphemia and

Barbara, besides a fragment from Jesus' table; the archbishop of Tyre was called to sign the certificate of authenticity together with Bishop Hubert of Banyas, who was a Templar.[87]

Before the fall of Jerusalem, this core of sacred goods was almost certainly kept in the mother-house of the Holy City, near the ruins of the Lord's Temple; when Jerusalem fell back into Muslim hands, all the Templar treasures were transferred to Acre headquarters, which became the Order's central point in the East. When Acre too fell in 1291, the collection of relics and of the most valuable objects found a place in Cyprus in the church of the chief mansion in Nicosia. The never-ending danger, however, had long since made it advisable to send many relics westward, and several such transfers are known to Italy, to England and in all likelihood to France as well, to the Paris headquarters. The picture reconstructed by Tommasi agrees perfectly with the statements of Jacques de Molay in the trial: the treasury of relics and liturgical furniture that adorned Templar churches was far superior to that of other religious orders and found its equal only in the treasuries of cathedrals. Two of these centre pieces, that is the body of Saint Euphemia and the Thorn of the Crown, came certainly from that collection that had been the pride of Byzantine emperors, and there was also kept the basin for Jesus' foot-wash during the Last Supper: these are relics which vanished with many others during the sack of Constantinople, and as things stand it is not possible to understand how the Templars managed to gain their possession. [88] I would like to add a curious coincidence: according to the account of Bishop Anthony of Novgorod, who visited Constantinople only a few years before the terrible sack, the cathedral of Hagia Sophia kept two slabs of stone that came from the Holy Sepulchre. During the trial against the Templars of England, an old man was called to testify who had served for 20 years in their mansion of Sumford, who described a relic that sounds exactly like one of these small slabs of stone. [89]

He said that he could not find anything bad to say about the Templar monks, except for one oddity he had seen and that had greatly surprised him: when the monks of the house had to carry out some important or demanding piece of business, they used to get up very early in the morning and go to the chapel of their church. There they approached the altar, and from the table of the altar they would draw a smaller stone table, cut so thin that it could be replaced back into the altar so that no outsider could have noticed it was there. Having lifted this stone tablet so that it could stand upright over the altar, everyone knelt and adored it, falling down to the ground before it. Nobody was allowed into that chapel who was not a Templar or at any rate closely connected with the Order. [90]

We should add that the Templars used to own a precious icon covered in gold and silver, which featured the Face of Christ, something analogous to the images on the verso of the seals of Germany's Masters and the face on the Templecombe panel.[91]

It is hardly surprising at the end of this long *excursus* that Francesco Tommasi is decidedly more optimistic than his colleagues from outside Italy about the idea of the Shroud passing into the Temple's possession:

For it is quite possible that the Templars might know the image of the man in the Shroud, without for that reason being the owners of the relic. Besides, there is an undeniable resemblance between the Christ's face (without the traditional aureole) as it appears on a wooden panel discovered in 1951 in Templecombe (Somerset), former home of a Templar community, and the face in the Shroud [...].Nonetheless there are overall elements enough not to treat Wilson's intuition as groundless; so the hypothesis that iconographies of the Christ of the Shroud type should have a special place in Templar devotional practice seems to me hardly to be rejected.[92]

The new data that has arisen make Ian Wilson's theory the likeliest one; Tommasi's balanced opinion is very valid, one might even go further. Certainly not every Templar testimony on the idol referred to this cult of the Holy Face, and in fact it is legitimate to think that many people confessed because of torture or other forms of violence. It is, however, a fact that within the order images of the Face of God circulated and were venerated, which were represented in an unusual way, without aureole and not showing the neck, that is exactly as it appears on the Shroud and in the Byzantine tradition of the *mandylion*.

Most recent Templar research add the confirmation that in some regions of southern France a full-figure portrait of a man on a linen sheet was offered to the brethren's adoration. The characteristics of this image on cloth that the Templars venerated in south France (full-scale life-sized body, reddish colour, ill-defined outline) seem in effect to recall nothing so much as the shape of the Turin Shroud. So many hints furthermore converge to indicate that the Shroud left a very strong imprint in the religious sensitivities of these warrior monks, and this is hardly surprising; according to science, the relic has some decidedly unique features, which it is not exaggerated to call stunning.

From the amphoras of Qumran to the nuns of Chambéry

The shroud is a linen artifact that, before the restoration of 2002, was made of pieces of material from cloths of different ages, styles, weaving techniques; to use an effective image, it was a patchwork quilt. As a whole, it is 4.36 metres long and 1.11 metres wide, but this data is in the nature of an average, which can vary by several centimetres if the cloth is stretched: for the linen is very yielding, due to its great age; it is crossed by the marks – never, at this point, to be removed again – of some folds that tell us how it was stored in certain stages of its history, and in time it has grown so thin as to be almost worn through because of the countless manipulations and even misfortunes it has endured. It has been suggested that whoever cut the stuff did so on the basis of a definite and commonly used unit of measurement, so that the cloth must have had a length equal to a multiple of this unit. The only such unit known that gives any sort of result is the Syrian cubit, used in the ancient Middle East, in whose terms the cloth is eight cubits long and two cubits wide. [93]

During its frequent obstentions to the faithful, the sheet was opened and hanged by pegs; it would hang in this pose for days, remaining stretched, touched by numerous hands, rubbed with many objects that became relics as soon as they touched it, sometimes even kissed. To prevent the linen from tearing under so much mechanical stress, in 1534 the original stuff was sewed on to another cloth of Dutch linen to make it thicker; then the margin was covered by a border in turquoise silk that allowed it to be handled freely without further touching the ancient material. At various times yet to be determined, there have been several minor repairs with fragments of other linen at points where the weave was broken by holes of various sizes; where the cloth was in danger of tearing, it was mended by the kind of artistic mending once used for precious lace, that is sewn with the same kind of thread by hands so expert that the most recent repairs are worked into warp and woof to the point of being almost invisible.

The ancient cloth is made of linen fibre worked according to a fairly complex technique that demanded the contemporary use of two spools instead of the more common one; as a result, the fibres show a counterclockwise twisting called "Z-shaped torsion". It was woven on a four-pedal craftsman's frame, using the so-called chevrons or fishbone technique, and a knot called "3-1" because the thread goes three times under the woof and only once over. Each square centimetre of the Shroud has 40 threads and weighs on average 23 grams. The

short sides have no selvage, the strip of cloth that stands at the start and end of every piece and has a special structure designed to prevent the stuff from unweaving itself when manhandled: this shows that it was cut from a longer roll of cloth.

Z-shaped torsion, fishbone technique and 3-1 knots belong to very ancient techniques of cloth-making and can be found in several artifacts from pre-Roman, Roman and mediaeval origin. The fishbone style is found in middle-eastern weaves from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, highly expensive materials meant for decorative purposes (pillow covers and embroidered borders): for that technique creates a stuff which reflects light differently according to the position from which the eye looks at it. There is a certain innate luminousness in linen cloth, and in the case of this particular work the superimposition of threads creates a design of repeated V-shapes in relief alternating with V-shapes in depression; that is, the weave has a bright-opaque variation effect that reminds us of certain ancient brocades with simple geometric designs. The German scholar Maria Luisa Rigato has recently confirmed the opinion already stated by other experts in ancient cloths, that the Shroud's stuff belongs to an expensive and not at all commonplace kind.[94]

It is a curious feature of the Shroud that it contains no trace whatever of wool fibre, a strange fact when you consider that it was by some distance the most widely used thread and that normally frames were used to weave every kind of thread; its fibres however include traces of cotton from the bush variety Gossypium herbaceum, the only one cultivated in the Middle East during antiquity, before the discovery of America allowed us to bring in all from the New World all the other varieties we now know. The cotton fibres are from other weaves woven on the same frame before the cloth of the Shroud was started, and which remained stuck to the machine and eventually ended up woven into the linen cloth. The total lack of wool suggests that that particular frame, for some special reason, had never used wool at all; now, the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament (22, 11) includes a norm that forbids weaving wool and linen together, because the mix of the two would produce ritual impurity, so it has reasonably been concluded that the frame had belonged to members of the Jewish religion, who did not violate the rule and made what their culture designated as a pure cloth. [95]

Besides the cotton fibre, the oldest weave also contains a large number of diverse materials, traces of objects it must have met in its long story: pollens from various vegetables, spores and the remains of insect bodies caught in the weave as it was left to weather itself in the open, wax, traces of aloe and myrrh, dye particles, red and blue silk once used to wrap it, ink and powders. Traces of

pigments found include ochre, Venetian red, and vermilion, along with proteins that once were used to fix and dissolve colour dye powders; they are present on the cloth in trace amounts, due to the fact that painted copies were rested on the Shroud to make them become relics. In 1973, the criminologist Max Frei carried out a study using the forensic science techniques in use among the scientific squad of the Swiss police, and identified traces of pollen belonging to 58 vegetable species originating from the Middle East, of which some were found in the Dead Sea area and in Jerusalem. Traces have also been found of at least 28 species of flowers laid on the body, most of which grow in Palestine and flower in the spring. The humus includes Aragonite, a fairly rare material which can however be found in the soil of caves near Jerusalem; and the presence of natron, used in Palestine and Egypt to preserve dead bodies, also points to a middle eastern origin. [96]

On one of the long sides, someone has sewn on a narrow strip of cloth that is shorter than 46 cm; some experts feel that it had been part of the larger cloth but that it had been unwoven and woven again. The reason is unknown; it was probably cut from the cloth, which was longer than required, to make a long band that could be used to tie the shroud around the corpse, about the feet, knees and neck, so that it could stay tight. It was only later that the band was retrieved and sewn again along the border from which it had previously been cut; for it was seen as a part of the Shroud, and it was wished to preserve it too. An interesting fact is that the technique by which it was sewn back on to the Shroud, called the false border, demands great expertise, and that it is only found twice in all our knowledge of ancient textiles: the Shroud and a linen fragment found in Masada, the fortress where a few Jewish rebels took refuge in the Jewish War and which the Romans destroyed in 73 AD. It is also interesting that the thread used for the sewing is not of the same kind as those that make up the Shroud, with their complex Z-shaped torsion structure, but belongs to a simpler and more ordinary kind (S-type torsion); it may be that the person who sewed it back was no longer able to obtain the same kind of thread, which were surely of uncommon quality, and had to be satisfied with what she or he found. [97]

The upper left hand side shows another glaring lacuna: it is the part that was destroyed in the radio-carbon test. Near this lost rectangle of material we can see clear traces of burning in a double strip, that run through the Shroud for all its length. In fact, these show the position of a fold that was part of the way the cloth was stored in the sixteenth century, when it was kept in Chambéry, then the capital of the Duchy of Savoy, now a French provincial town. In 1532 a fire burst out in the ducal palace's chapel heated the invaluable silver casing where the Shroud was kept almost to melting point, and a few droplets of metal — or

possibly a sharp and heated object – burned the cloth. The Poor Clare nuns then repaired it, adding many patches of linen in those parts where no material had been left at all; the accident also left four holes in a rhomboid shape near the middle of the cloth, as well as a quantity of stains left more or less everywhere and due to the impurities in the large amounts of water used to extinguish the fire. It may however be that someone had accidentally water-stained the Shroud much earlier.

In April 2008 Aldo Guerreschi and Michele Salcito published in the specialist magazine *Arch* the results of a research they had carried out on the water-stains left on the Shroud. Until then it had always been thought that they were the result of the water used in Chambéry to extinguish the fire, but analysis showed a different truth. The very shape of the Chambéry scorch marks allows us to reconstruct the way that the Shroud was put away in the 1500s: it was a most careful and precise folding, with the edges accurately lined up with each other, done by first laying the Shroud down on a long table. The water stains, however, speak of a wholly different folding, the kind called concertina, but above all one that was far less precise: the edges did not match, and the central fold did not fall in the exact centre of the cloth. This is more reminiscent of a housewife snatching a sheet from the rain and folding it in a hurry to run back inside before the storm reaches its height; that is, it leaves the feeling of a rushed, provisional arrangement. Turned in on itself in a concertina shape, and then closed, the cloth was not in even tension, but the forward part was sagging under its own weight. By the way it was arranged, it is also possible to deduce the shape of the container where it had been placed: a cylindrical object, narrow, long, and not very large. It was not a case like its Chambéry silver reliquary and it did not, either, resemble the lovely Byzantine container decorated in lozenges which we see from the representations of the *mandylion*: rather, it was a container designed for other purposes, where the Shroud was perhaps only provisionally housed. The shape of the object is exactly like that of the terracotta amphoras found in Qumran, which held the 800 or more manuscripts of the Essene library: in effect, amphoras were very versatile containers where anything could and would be stored, from oil to grain to books. At the very bottom of that container there was some water, a small amount but enough to dampen the lower part of the cloth. [98]

This reconstruction seems to open a new and promising path of research. No doubt that kind of earthenware container was a highly commonplace object, made all over the Middle East and certainly not only in Qumran: but no doubt the community that lived in isolation on the Dead Sea shore had several features that might make it a safe refuge for the earliest Christians, persecuted by the

Jerusalem authorities almost from the time of Jesus' death. At any rate, if Salcito and Guerreschi's reconstruction is correct, it argues for a phase in the Shroud's history in which this object was not exhibited to the veneration of the faithful, but, on the contrary, hidden: whoever raised the lid would not have seen anything but a featureless mass of cloth, too tightly turned in on itself to show even the abundant marks of blood. As is known, Jewish tradition held blood in horror and saw it as necessary to destroy anything that had come into contact with corpses, as being in the highest degree impure and able to pollute people, things and places.[99]

Between the 12th and 13th centuries, the Templars held dozens of establishments in the Syro-Palestinian territories, but there is no evidence that they ever had any direct contact with Qumran: what archaeology currently tells us is that the Essene citadel was abandoned in 68 AD and never reopened until almost twenty centuries had passed. On the other hand, that the Shroud may have spent some time in the Qumran over a thousand years before it ended up in the Templars' hands – this does seem possible.

- [1] Michelet, Le Procès, II, pp. 279, 299, 300, 313, 315-316, 364, 367.
- [2] Ibid., 363.
- [3] Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg. Aven. 48, ff. 449-450r.
- [4] Michelet, *Le Procès*, II, pp. 192-193.
- [5] Tommaso da Celano, *San Francesco*, pp. 130-138; see also Cardini, *Francesco d'Assisi*, pp. 231-273.
- [6] 19, 11-12 (Nestle-Aland, p. 1167).
- [7] Schottmüller, II, pp. 375-400, pp. 379-380, 392-398.
- [8] Michelet, *Le Procès*, I, p. 502; II, p. 218.
- [9] Ibid.; Gugumus, *Orsola e compagne*, coll. 1252-1267.
- [10] Michelet, *Le Procès*, II, p. 240.
- [11] Ibid., I, p. 597.
- [12] Du Fresne, *Glossarium*, p. 447.
- [13] Michelet, *Le Procès*, I, pp. 190-191; Paris, Archives Nationales, J 413 n. 25, unnumbered folios (f. 9); Finke, II, pp. 323-324.
- [14] Savio, *Pellegrinaggio di san Carlo*, pp. 447-448.
- [15] Demurger, Vita e morte, pp. 220-221; Frale, L'ultima battaglia dei Templari, pp. 287-293; Brown, La morte del Messia, pp. 1330-1338; Id., Giovanni, pp. 1181-1195.
- [16] Dupuy, *Histoire*, pp. 26-28.
- [17] See for instance the statements made by the monks questioned at Pont-del'Arche, in Prutz, *Entwicklung*, pp. 334-335, and Dupuy, *Histoire*, p. 22.
- [18] Curzon, *La Règle*, §§ 21, 37.
- [19] Michelet, *Le Procès* I, p. 419.
- [20] Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg. Aven. 48, f. 443r; Schottmüller, II, pp. 64-66.
- [21] Curzon, *La Règle*, § 40.
- [22] Sève, *Le procès*, p. 192.
- [23] Michelet, *Le Procès*, I, p. 502, II, pp. 191, 279; Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg. Aven. 48 c. 443v; Schotmüller, II, p. 67.

- [24] Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg. Aven 48, f. 444r, lines 15-17.
- [25] These images, which belong to the Byzantine tradition of iconography, have been studied by Wilson, *Holy Faces*.
- [26] Sterlingova, *The New Testament Relics*, pp. 88-89. I am grateful to Emanuela Marinelli for informing me about this object.
- [27] Wilson, *Le suaire de Turin*, pp. 152-253.
- [28] The theology of icons is a particularly fascinating chapter of Christian thought. This study has taken as reference the fine volume by Cardinal Schönborn, *L'icona di Cristo*.
- [29] Jugie, Iconoclastia, coll. 1538-1542; Schönborn, L'icona di Cristo, pp. 131-158.
- [30] Schönborn, L'icona di Cristo, pp. 15-36; Uspenskij, La teologia dell'icona, pp. 101-132.
- [31] St. Basil the Great, A treatise on the Holy Spirit, 18, 45; PG 32, col. 149; Homily for Gordianuss the martyr, PG 31, col. 490; St. Gregory of, Solemn Encomium for the great martyr Theodore, PG 46, coll. 737-739.
- [32] Mt 28, 20 (edizione Nestle-Aland, p. 285); Schönborn, *L'icona di Cristo*, pp. 169-175
- [33] St. John Damascene, *A treatise on images*, I, 19, in PG 94, col. 1249 d: but the idea had already been stated by St. Gregory of Nissa, cfr. Schönborn, *L'icona di Cristo*, pp. 27-36; Gordillo, *Giovanni Damasceno*, coll. 547-552; Ozoline, *La théologie de l'icône*, p. 409.
- [34] Weitzmann, *Le icone*, pp. 5-6; Kazhdan, *Bisanzio e la sua civiltà*, p. 96-98; Schönborn, *L'icona di Cristo*, pp. 194-210.
- [35] Johannet, *Un office inédit*, pp. 143-155; Auzépy, *L'iconodulie*, pp. 157-165; Marion, *Le prototype de l'image*, p. 461; Shalina, *The Icon of Christ*, pp. 324-328; Curzon, *La Règle*, § 342; *Cronaca di Imad ad-Din, in Storici arabi delle crociate*, p. 135; statement of Raoul de Gisy, Preceptor of Champagne, Paris Inquiry, Autumn 1307, in Michelet, *Le Procès*, II, pp. 363-365; Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg. Aven. 48, cc. 441r e 443r, edito in Schottmüller, II, pp. 30, 68.
- [36] Icone, pp. 19-21.
- [<u>37</u>] Jugie, *Concilio di Efeso*, coll. 114-119.
- [38] For instance 1 Ts 2, 15; 3, 11; 3, 13; Col 1, 3; 1 Cor, 1, 2; 2, 9; 6, 14, 9, 5. Légasse, *Paolo e l'universalismo cristiano*, pp. 106-158; Trocmé, *Le prime comunità*, pp. 75-105; Jossa, *Introduzione*, pp. 15-29; Ratzinger-Benedetto XVI, *Gesù di Nazareth*, pp. 333-352.
- [39] Ostrogorsky, Storia dell'impero bizantino, pp. 139-202; Jugie, Iconoclastia, coll. 1541-1546.
- [40] Riant, *Exuviae*, ad esempio pp. 216-217, 218-224, 233-234.
- [41] Ostrogorsky, *Storia dell'impero bizantino*, pp. 97-98; Dubarle, *Storia antica*, pp. 39-41.
- [42] Riant, *Exuviae*, p. 220.
- [43]Gv 1, 14: (Nestle-Aland, p. 758).
- [44] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Gr. 511, cc. 143r-150v; Zaninotto, *La traslazione a Costantinopoli*, pp. 344-352; Dubarle, *L'homélie de Grégoire le Référendaire*, pp. 5-51.
- [45] Schönborn, L'icona di Cristo, pp. 74-75.
- [46] Belting, *Il culto delle immagini*, pp. 105-132.
- [47] Schönborn, *L'icona di Cristo*, pp. 58-63; Dulaey, *I simboli cristiani*, pp. 52-69; Crippa e Zibawi, *L'arte paleocristiana*, pp. 69-108.
- [48] Emmanuel, *The Holy Mandylion*, pp. 292-293.
- [49] See passim Farina, *L'Impero e l'imperatore cristiano*.
- [50] Zaninotto, *La traslazione a Costantinopoli*, pp. 344-352
- [51] Wilson, Holy Faces, pp. 149-151; Dubarle, Storia antica, p.51.
- [52] On this subject, read through Grondijs' magnificent work, *L'iconographie byzantine du crucifié*, and also Shalina, *The Icon of Christ*, pp. 324-336, and Jászai, *Crocifisso*, pp. 577-586.
- [53] Emmanuel, The Holy Mandylion, pp. 291-292.
- [54] Dubarle, *Histoire ancienne*, pp. 105-106; Baima Bollone, *La sindone e la scienza*, pp. 89-94.
- [55] Wilson, *Le sainte suaire*, pp. 152-165.
- [56] Egeria, Diario di viaggio, p. 83; Frolow, La relique, pp. 21-152; Wilson, Le sainte suaire, pp. 200, 208.
- [57] Wilson, *Holy Faces*, p. 156, gives a reproduction of the original manuscript that contains the description (Royal Copenhagen Library, ms. 487, fol. 123).

- [58] I thank Marco Palmerini for pointing me towards this reconstruction; about the matter see also Lidov, *The Mandylion*, p. 268, and Shalina, *The Icon of Christ*, pp. 333-334, featuring a scheme of how the elevation was performed.
- [59] Lidov, *The Mandylion*, pp. 268-280; Bacci, *Relics of the Pharos Chapel*, pp. 234-246; Zocca, Icone, coll. 1538-1542.
- [60] Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, p. 134, discussed in Wilson, *Holy Faces*, p. 152.
- [61] Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III, lib. IX, 8.
- [62] Gervasio di Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, III, pp. 966-967.
- [63] Savio, Ricerche storiche, p. 340, nota 31.
- [64] Wilson, *Le sainte suaire*, pp. 207-208; Wilson, *Holy Faces*, pp. 145-148, figg. 17, 26-27; Zaninotto, *L'immagine edessena*, pp. 57-62.
- [65] Wilson, *Le sainte suaire*, pp. 215-253.
- [66]Les Journaux du Trésor, for instance p. 156 e p. 195, dated May 31, 1349: in societate domini Gaufridi de Charneyo militis et consiliarii Regis.
- [67] Frale, *L'ultima battaglia dei Templari*, pp. 19-20; cf. Archivio Segreto Vaticano, for instance Reg. Lat.
- 818, ff. 51r (de Cuenca) and 52r (de Cuencha), f. 293r (de Pugdorfila) e 294r (de Purdeifila); Reg. Lat. 819, f. 6r (Palmiero) e f. 7v (Palmerio), ecc.
- [68] Léonard, *Introduction au cartulaire*, p. 160; Michelet, *Le Procès*, II, pp. 289-290; I, p. 295; Curzon, *La Règle*, §87.
- [69] Géraud, *Cronique*, pp. 402-404.
- [70] Godefroy, Dictionnaire, I, p. 628.
- [71] Michelet, *Le Procès*, I, p. 628; Mannier, *Ordre de Malte*, pp. 181-184; Carrière, *Histoire et cartulaire des Templiers*, pp. 69-70.
- [72] Dijon, Archives Départementales, *Charny* 12-LXIII e H 1169 (Petit Temple de Dijon), quoted by Léonard, *Introduction*, pp. 331-332; Langlois, La Bible Guiot, p. 65; *Anselme de la Vierge Marie*, I, p. 473 A e B, II, p. 481; *Cronique de Morée*, p. 137.
- [73] Carile, *Per una storia*, pp. 103-110; Flori, *Culture chevaleresque*, pp. 371-387; Nicol, *Venezia e Bisanzio*, pp. 167-179.
- [74] Goldstein, Zara, pp. 359-370; Frale, *La quarta crociata*, pp. 468-470.
- [75] Tucci, La spedizione marittima, pp. 3-18; Nicol, Venezia e Bisanzio, pp. 169-171.
- [76] Maleczek, Innocenzo III e la quarta crociata, pp. 389-422.
- [77] Nicol, Venezia e Bisanzio, pp. 186-193.
- [78] Ducellier, *Il sacco di Costantinopoli del 1204*, pp. 368-377.
- [79] Riant, *Des dépouilles*, pp. 7, 18-19, 27-35.
- [80] Ibid., pp. 4-5; Claverie, *Un "illustris amicus Venetorum"*, pp. 506-510.
- [81] Riant, *Exuviae*, pp. 44-45.
- [82] Ibid., pp. 48-52; Durand, *Reliquie e reliquiari*, pp. 386-389.
- [83] Barber, *The Templars and the Turin Shroud*, p. 225; Id., *The Trial*, p. 273.
- [84] Tommasi, *I Templari e il culto delle reliquie*, pp. 191-210; *Acta Polycarpi*, Ian. III, p. 319, in Riant, *Exuviae*, p. 2.
- [85] Schottmüller, II, pp. 157-158.
- [86] Michelet, *Le Procès*, I, pp. 646-647.
- [87] Tommasi, I Templari e il culto delle reliquie, p. 202.
- [88] Mention of the presence of the pelvis, the bowl of the Last Supper, appears in several description of the sacred treasure of Constantinople; cfr. Riant, *Exuviae*, for instance pp. 211, 213, but according to others it was a marble basin (cfr. pp. 219, 223).
- [89] Ibid', pp. 48, 220.
- [90] Schottmüller, II, pp. 91-92.
- [91] Tommasi, I Templari e il culto delle reliquie, p. 197.
- [92] Ibid., pp. 193-194.
- [93] On these values cf. Wiseman and Wheaton, Weights and Measures.
- [94] Timossi, Analisi, pp. 105-111; Pastore Trossello, La struttura tessile, pp. 64-73; Jackson, Jewish

Burial, pp. 309-322; Vial, *Le Linceul*, pp. 11-24; Whanger and Whanger, *A Comparison*, pp. 379-381; Baima Bollone, *Sindone e scienza*, pp. 83-106; Flury-Lemberg, *Sindone* 2002, pp. 25-48; Rigato, *Il titolo della croce*, pp. 198-217.

- [95] Raes, Rapport d'analise, pp. 79-83; Jackson, Hasadeen Hakadosh, pp. 27-33.
- [96] Baima Bollone, La presenza della mirra, pp. 169-174, e Id., *Sindone e scienza*, pp. 5-31; Scannerini, *Mirra*, *aloe*, *pollini*; Upinsky, *La démonstration*, pp. 313-334; Curto, *La Sindone*, pp. 59-85; Frei, *Il passato della sindone*, pp. 191-200; Id., *Identificazione e classificazione*, pp. 277-284; Danin, *Pressed Flowers*, pp. 35-37, 69; Kohlbeck e Nitowski, New Evidence, pp. 23-24.
- [97] Baima Bollone, *La sindone e la scienza*, pp. 60-61, 83-86.
- [98] Guerreschi and Salcito, *Tra le pieghe*, pp. 62-71.
- [99] Lipinski, Sangue, p. 1161; Sacchi, Storia del Secondo Tempio, pp. 417-421.

III Against all Heresies

A map of butchery

Because of its unique properties, the Shroud of Turin was an object that could leave an indelible mark on the spirituality of a religious order such as the Templars: and that is exactly what happened.

The cloth's most singular feature is that on one of its faces can be seen the image and imprint of an individual, corresponding and practically fused together: they return the outline of a man as if he had been wrapped in them. This is an adult but youthful person, drawn up in the rigor mortis that is typical of cadaveric muscle in the first few hours after death, and bears everywhere the marks of several traumas and violence. This man wrapped in the cloth, whoever he was, had been slaughtered. Beside the numerous wounds that cover the whole body surface, we know that his face was struck repeatedly and with great violence: his nose was broken to the extent of showing a discomposed fracture, and streaks of blood flowed from the wound and soaked the linen. The right side of the face is completely swollen. [1]

The print on the shroud is made mainly of blood, sweat, a mixture of aromatic oils, the traces of earth we already mentioned, and probably also bits of skin torn off during the tortures: all these substances have been left on the sheet by direct contact, that is when the body was shrouded. The blood is human AB group, as shown by a team of forensic medicinal experts led by Pier Luigi Baima Bollone, the Professor of Legal Medicine at the University of Turin; it contains a large amount of bilirubin, as happens in subjects who have suffered a violent death. The blood imprint near the face seems connected to the unusual phenomenon of "sweating blood"; it is a rare process that is found when a person suffers a tremendous emotional shock, which causes the skin's blood vessels to dilate and cause a kind of haemorrhage in the sweat glands. Near the cranium can be seen the marks of 13 wounds inflicted by sharp objects of the same kind, arranged over the upper part of the head to form a kind of helm or head-cover, which caused several lines of coagulated blood. They are also present in the face area, where a curious flow stands out where the blood has taken; it shows an abundant

flow, for it comes from a break in the frontal vein, while the unusual shape results from its coagulation over a forehead already contracted in furrows by atrocious suffering. Several analyses have found that the haemorrhages, which the sheet touched, come in part from wounds inflicted when the man was alive, and in part from when he was already dead. The rivulets of blood described took place mainly while the victim was still in a vertical position. Examination of the blood flow and of its characteristics seems to have proved that the man was placed in the sheet no more than two and a half hours after death.[2]

When ultra-violet light is shone on the cloth, it shows the person's entire body covered with a large number of lacerated and contused wounds (save the ones to the face and to the area of the heart) inflict while the subject was naked; these wounds are placed with a certain symmetry in groups of sixes, as if an object with six spikes had been used to strike the man a great many times, possibly 120. In the shoulder-blade area, these wounds, after having been inflicted, have been further expanded and scratched as if a large and rigid object had been viciously rubbed over the back, causing lacerations of the skin near the bone protrusions. All these wounds and excoriations draw many stains of blood, as does the hole in the left wrist, placed to cover the right one which is unseen, and in the feet.

The holes near the wrists and feet, the contracted posture of the chest and of the thigh muscles, the rips left by a large and stiff support on the back, indicate that the man was executed by crucifixion, a form of capital punishment practiced in antiquity by several peoples including Assyrians, Celts and Romans.

It amounted to fastening a man to a pole by various means and waiting for him to die over a long time and after indescribable suffering; the tears on the back suggest that the condemned man had to bear for some time an object shaped like a *patibulum*, a large wooden beam that was anchored to the pole and served to fix the body so as to make it impossible for the victim to move. In the time of the Persian King Darius (522-485 a.C.) people were executed by impaling, but later it became common to nail the condemned man's hands and feet to the wood: a passage of the book of Isaiah, who lived between VIII and VII centuries BC, and above all a verse in Psalm 22 ("They have pierced my hands and my feet) already seem to point to this practice of nailing, which was later (III century BC – I d.C.) to become a sadly common affair, as shown among other things by fragments from the excavations of Qumran.[3]

In June 1968, north of Jerusalem in the area called Giv'at ha-Mivtar, a family grave of impressive dimensions was found, holding the bones of nearly twenty persons; an ossuary held the remains of a man crucified at about thirty years of age. A nail was still driven into the bone of the heel, and it had not been possible to draw it out as he was taken down from the cross, because it had bent inwards.

Under the reign of King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC) crucifixion became tragically commonplace, falling briefly into disuse in the reign of Herod the Great (39-4 BC) only to then be brought back by the Roman legate Publius Quintilius Varus. Romans practised this kind of execution very early, reserving it for public or solemn executions of persons who did not enjoy the protection of Roman citizenship, major public enemies who had committed extremely serious crimes or had placed public order at risk; the case of the revolt of slaves led by Spartacus had become famous – after the revolt, it had been decided to inflict an exemplary punishment on the rebels, and the crosses on which they had died had lined miles upon miles of Via Appia. According to the Greek historians Polybius and Plutarch, it was reserved for those convicted of crimes against the State; Cicero and Livy say that Romans regarded it as the most cruel and disgraceful of penalties. The enormous agonies suffered by the condemned excited the same ugly pleasure that drove the Roman people to gladiator games, and when these public shows also featured some crucifixions, the advertising mentioned it as if it was a special treat to get the public in, no different from distributions of fruit and money. Crucifixion was chosen when political enemies had to be got rid of, because it added appalling suffering to the insult of an infamous death, and the history of the Jewish people includes many cases of this kind, cases in which it was desired to make punishment spectacular by turning it into a ghastly mass display. In 162 BC, high priest Alkimos had 60 devout Jews who opposed him crucified in a single day, while King Alexander Iannaeus in 88 BC had as many as 800 Pharisees killed. No more than 13 years later, 80 other people suffered the same fate under charges of sorcery.[5]

In crucifixion by nailing of limbs, the condemned man tended to die by asphyxia, for the body weight pushed the ribcage downward and only allowed him to breathe in, while breathing out demanded motions that caused intolerable pain. The presence of the several secondary wounds informs us that it was a crucifixion carried out in the Roman fashion, that is by having the actual execution follow an additional form of torture, flagellation: the victim was struck with the *flagrum*, a whip with a wooden handle and leather strips at whose ends were sticks of bone or wood with points at both ends. Violently enough handled, these stings were literally able to rip skin off. No known description of Roman usage, on the other hand, can be connected with the two other outrages suffered by this individual: whatever it was that caused the multiple wounds over the cranium, and the wound between the fifth and sixth rib on the right of the chest, was caused by a pointed and cutting weapon. That wound may be connected with the fact that the condemned man did not have his legs broken, a Jewish

practice meant to hasten the convict's death and be able to bury them before the end of the day according to a precept in Deuteronomy. Such alterations to normal practice could be explained by the Gospel account: the trial of Jesus of Nazareth took place in a unique socio-political context, and for that reason his burial too did not follow the usual practice. [6]

The "belt of blood" and the "sign of Jonas"

The most glaring of all the blood marks can be found on the right side of the chest, near the fifth space between the ribs. It was caused by a large wound, 4.5 cm long and 1.5 cm broad, with straight and slightly spread margins, typical of a wound inflicted by a pointed weapon used for cutting. The big blood flow that followed it and soaked the cloth went down the side and ended up colouring the whole breadth of the back, creating a horizontal stripe; this glaring red-brown streak is even more visible to the eye when the back imprint of the Shroud is looked at; because of its shape and the impression it makes, the specialists called it "the belt of blood". The abundance of the blood flow suggests that the wound caused a break in the lung or in the upper right ventricle of the heart; furthermore it was found that this blood has broken down into its two components, that is the serum and the blood particles (red globules), which never happens except after death. The wound that ripped the chest open was made when the man was already a corpse. [7]

Modern historians are in the habit of looking at the Shroud with the eyes of science, that is in the light of the countless chemical and physical analyses carried out more or less ceaselessly on it since the early nineteen hundreds; but we have to take a step back and try to understand how men from the Middle Ages saw it. From the tear in the ribs, just where the spear had struck, Jesus according to the gospel of John, the signs of a huge haemorrhage were visible. The blood had flowed down the side, drenching the cloth all the breadth of the thorax, from side to side. Deep red on the ivory white of the linen, this sign leapt to the eye, glaring, awesome.

To those who used to listen to the story of the Passion, as the Templars did, the belt of blood must have held an immense fascination. Could this "belt", red with blood, be something which the Templars tried to represent with the little strand they bore on their bodies every day? Their belts had once been consecrated by touching the stone of the Sepulchre that had received the body of Jesus and seen his resurrection. And the shroud, too, according to tradition, had

shrouded Jesus' body and had "experienced" his rise from death, but with something extra: a bit of his blood still rested on the material. For a mediaeval man, this was priceless: later on, the Franciscan theologian Francesco della Rovere, later to be Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484), pointed to the Shroud of Turin, in his treatise *De Corpore et Sanguine Christi*, would point exactly to the Shroud of Turin as the relic of the Lord's true blood.[8]

As we mentioned, in St. Bernard's time the Templars' belt had a merely symbolic value, representing the vow of chastity; then during the twelve hundreds, this meaning was as though forgotten and replaced with a loftier, almost theological one: the belt is consecrated through contact with relics and material places that have witnessed the earthly life of Jesus, it is therefore impregnated with a special sacred power and gives the monks who wear it a material contact with the human dimension of Christ. I am certain (as I have already said) that the special night ceremonies the Templars carried out by the Holy Sepulchre were vigils of prayer during which the dignitaries consecrated by contact the linen strands that would then be given to all future order members, a guarantee of protection against the enemies of body and soul. I would not be surprised at all if one day new documents were to show that the great reputation enjoyed by the Templar dignitaries in their time as profound experts in relics also depended on the fact that benefactors of the order often asked them to consecrate certain objects - rings, handkerchiefs and so on during those same liturgies at the Sepulchre, to make them in turn relics as precious as Templar strands. We know for certain that the King of France, Louis IX the Saint, had exactly that done, and who knows how many others did. [9]

By coming into contact with stone that had been present at the resurrection of Christ, the belt somehow absorbed its potency, and was itself a guarantee of resurrection for the Templar willing to live and die according to the spirit of the Order. In 1187 Jerusalem was lost, and we can only guess at what a terrible blow this was to Templar morale. Then, one day, along comes this unbelievable piece of cloth, with the marks of a man who had been literally butchered exactly as Jesus had been, according to the Gospels. The most authoritative tradition describes it as the true winding-sheet of Christ. What can be seen on that sheet is not only terribly realistic, it is even embarrassing: indeed, it forces Christians to reflect.

Mediaeval man interpreted some things in a much clearer way than we can today. The corpse that was wrapped in the Shroud was wholly stiff, its neck collapsed on its chest, the fingers extended, the muscles at full tension. Such rigor mortis occurs between one to three hours following death, and becomes complete by about ten to 12, and fades away after 36 to 48, because natural

decomposition begins to set in.[10]

Mediaeval men were aware of such matters as it was part of their life. The bodies of their beloved dead were often exhibited on a bed in the house and stayed there, surrounded by lit candles, for many hours, under the eyes of relatives who honoured the dead with long vigils of prayer which neighbours also attended. Bodies of Popes and other important figures were exhibited in the churches for several days, so that everyone was able to give them a last farewell. And then there was the sad and ghastly sight of battlefields, where unburied corpses could stay for indeterminate amounts of time, touched by jackal thieves, and by the poor in search of something however useful, before some merciful passer-by saw them somehow buried. Mediaeval man would know at first sight that that man had been inside the Shroud only for a definite time, that is no more than two or three days; for the mark had been made before rigor mortis had begun to pass off and flesh to naturally dissolve. Their minds must have gone straight to the words of the Gospels: "For it is written that the Christ was to suffer first, and be raised from the dead on the third day".[11]

In the language of Scripture, this was called the "sign of Jonah", with reference to the episode of Jonah who had spent three days inside the belly of a whale. Jesus had used this comparison to announce his death and coming resurrection, and in Christian art the symbolic tale of Jonah coming out of the mouth of the sea monster had always been widely popular, since it allowed the artist's fantasy to run wild. It was also an excellent way to inculcate the mystery of the resurrection to simple and unlettered people. [12]

The Templars belonged to a religious order and followed the liturgies of the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre: their daily lives were timed by a fixed cycle of hours during which they listened to readings of the Old Testament and the gospels. They knew perfectly what the "Sign of Jonah" was, and its exact meaning; if they saw the image on the shroud, the unbelievable realism of that tense and tormented body must have roused emotions beyond what we can guess. Even in Constantinople, the sight of the ribs must have roused profound emotion and astonishment, as shown by the words of Gregory the Referendarius, who first saw the image in 944 when the mandylion was taken from its holder and subjected to in-depth investigation to ensure it was the right item to take to the capital; to the Templars, if anything, the shock was even stronger, because the order had been established for the armed defence of Christians, and in its own specific ideology lay the idea that the Templar who died to save the weaker was imitating the sufferings of Christ. During the Cyprus trial, a layman appeared in defence of the Templars and explained it all with exemplary clarity to the commissioner bishops, remembering the sacrifice made by Grand Master

Guillaume de Beaujeu, who had practically let himself be killed to cover the retreat of others: "he preferred to die to defend the Catholic faith, and chose to pour his blood for Christ against the enemies of the faith just as Christ did for our redemption".[13]

About one-quarter of the length of the Shroud, there is another series of holes that also seem arranged to mirror each other on both sides, because they also come from a burn that took place while the sheet was folded. They are four holes, three in a row and one further on the side. Already in the past it had been noticed that a shroud with this exact kind of holes is represented in a miniature of the striking Pray manuscript, a codex made between 1192 and 1195 in a Benedictine Abbey, well known among scholars for containing the first written testimonies of the Hungarian language. A recent study by Marcel Alonso, Éric de Bazelaire and Thierry Castex has brought out the fact that the miniature of the three Marys visiting the sepulchre tells the story rather oddly: the angel shows the women the shroud that had covered Jesus' face, fallen to one side, while the larger shroud is still found stretched out on the stone where the body had lain. In typical XII century fashion, the artist shows the shroud cloth with an upper face in fishbone weave, and on which can be noticed four holes in the very same shape they bear in the Turin cloth; on the back, there is a white lining decorated with many red Greek crosses like those which were the badge and the pride of the Templars. [14] It's an interesting clue that suggests that in Constantinople too they attached a lining to the Shroud to increase its consistency, like they were to do in the 1500s in Chambéry; but nobody says that that motif in closely drawn red crosses should necessarily be connected with the order of the Temple. In fact, it was a symbolic decoration widely used in Constantinople: a lovely icon from the 1300s which represents Christ as Supreme Pontiff, shows his sumptuous liturgical dress studded with crosses just like those in the Pray codex miniature, and many other Saints' figures in Byzantine icons with that typical design of many closely drawn crosses. More than any direct contact with the Templars, what these ornamental motifs in the Pray codex confirm is that in 1192-1195 the Shroud was still in the possession of the Emperor of Byzantium; but that does not make the idea of any connection with the Templar Order wholly absurd. The Templars had a special funerary custom, which allowed the monk who had lived with honour the privilege of being buried in a linen shroud on which was woven a red woollen cloth cross, the Greek cross patent that was the badge and honour of the order. It was a local and uncommon habit, since in Western monasticism monks were generally buried in the usual habit of their order. [15]

We don't know at present whether the abbey where the Pray codex was made had any special link with the Temple, but it is certain that the Templars had several establishments in the area; furthermore, they were familiar with the Byzantine court, since some of their dignitaries had been employed by Byzantine emperors in delicate diplomatic missions.[16]

At any rate, the miniatures of the Pray codex represent a first-rate avenue of research in the early history of the Shroud. They represent the burial of Christ with unusual realism for the period: Joseph of Arimathea takes an already stiff corpse down from the cross, places it naked on the shroud, and cannot compose the hands over the pubis properly because they were still spread out in the cross posture. This corresponds exactly to what may be seen of the man of the Shroud; considering the stiffness of the muscle, to place the hands one over the other they must in all likelihood have bound his wrists together. [17]

Another major fact is that the Jesus of the Pray codex has hands whose thumbs cannot be seen. This is alien to the whole tradition of Christian iconography, and can only be derived from the Shroud, in which the thumb, exactly, is folded inward – hence invisible – by the damage caused to the median nerve by the nail. This surprising detail, together with the fishbone weave and the four holes in a pattern, means that the author of the miniatures was not meaning to draw any kind of shroud, but intended to make an exact depiction of the Shroud of Turin, an individual and extremely famous object, unique and with unmistakeable details. The Pray miniature, in short, contains an identikit of the Shroud as it appeared in the eleventh century to pilgrims – one of whom was probably the ancient miniaturist – who had the privilege to see it exhibited in Constantinople on the occasion of very solemn ceremonies, garnished with a precious lining bearing the signs of high priesthood according to Byzantine religious culture. It should be noted that the King of Hungary, Béla III, had married the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180). These are facts of overwhelming historical importance: the Pray code is much older than the age suggested by a 1988 radio-carbon test on the Shroud. It seems clear that something went wrong with that test, possibly a simple lack of essential data.

To finish with, we do not currently have any certain information on the moment the Templars took possession of the Shroud, nor do we know precisely when it passed into other hands; most likely, the politically-demanded forced dissolution of the order in 1312, and then the death of the last Grand Master at the stake, forced it into the hands of other guardians. There are on the other hand no doubts that the Shroud, thanks to its unique properties, left ineffaceable traces on the Templars' spirituality and liturgical uses: traces already pointed out by Ian Wilson in 1978, and which led to similar beliefs by Malcolm Barber and Francesco Tommasi, two great scholars in Templar history. Systematic

investigations into the Templar trial in recent years have done nothing but confirm their intuitions. And maybe they allow us to say a little more still.

Images

The Shroud's cloth carries traces of aloe and myrrh, substances used in antiquity to help the preservation of dead bodies: they could be bound together to form an oily anointing substance, or else used as powders to spread over the corpse. According to some investigators, these substances had a basic role in the mechanism that allowed the forming of the strange image. The traces of humus already mentioned can be found near the heels, typical of a body that had walked without shoes, and near the right knee, where the image also shows a noticeable swelling, as if the person had fallen and hit the ground viciously; since the same humus has also been found near the tip of the nose, it has been deduced that the victim must have tumbled down without a chance of covering his face with his hands.[18] This is also a detail that must make historians reflect. None of the four gospels speaks of Jesus falling during the climb to Golgotha; but in the special liturgy of the Via Crucis, celebrated during Holy Week, it is remembered that Jesus fell to earth under the weight of the Cross no less than three times. The glaring swelling visible on the man in the Shroud's knee and face could give great credibility to the notion of several falls to the ground, and this might even suggest that the Holy Week liturgy had been affected by the examination of this astonishing object, taken in the past for an undoubtedly genuine relic. From what we know, the Via Crucis was born in Syria-Palestine from a very ancient local tradition first given fixed shape by St. Petronius in the fifth century. Later, during the Crusades, the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem played a major part in popular devotion: a special staged pilgrimage in the places of Jerusalem where the Passion had taken place. Later still, towards the end of the Middle Ages, this liturgy was greatly encouraged by Franciscan and Carmelite friars. All its "stations" recall facts mentioned in the Gospels, except for three: Jesus' meeting with his mother, the merciful gesture of Veronica in drying his bleeding face, and the three falls. These are believed to actually come from the popular religious tradition of Jerusalem, a wealth of traditions probably handed down in the local Christian community from father to son. [19]

The two images – front and back – present in the Shroud, are found exactly above this big mark left by blood, sweat and other substances such as myrrh and aloe; it was formed after all these compounds had entered and soaked the cloth.

As pointed out earlier, it has the singular feature of being visible only if the observer stands at a distance from two to nine metres from the unfolded sheet: any closer or farther off, and the human eye can only see featureless bloodstains. What is seen is the outline of a tall adult male, presumably 170-180 cm, with a long lean figure, and well-defined muscles, possibly in part because of the cadaveric rigidity already discussed. The subject must have been between 30 and 40; to judge from the lack of fat in his physique, he did not eat much and was used to manual labour. His neck is wholly collapsed forwards, with his chin touching his sternum, his chest has stiffened while being flexed forwards, and his legs also seem slightly folded; his arms are stretched along his sides, while forearms and hands, one over the other, are joined to cover the pubes. Neither hand's imprint shows the thumb, and this (as I mentioned) is probably to do with the wound in the centre of the wrist: the object that pierced it also damaged the median nerve, and the finger reflexively bent completely towards the inside of the hand. The feet are also slightly superimposed, and the right foot seems almost crushed against the cloth, as if cadaveric rigidity had set in as the man found himself with this foot attached for the whole of its length to a hard and vertical surface. The man wore a moustache and a middle-length beard that seems to be parted in the middle and was in part torn off; his long hair reached to his shoulder and joined along the axis of his back in a sort of pigtail, while on the side of the face it appears slightly lifted rather than falling straight down, just as if it had been corrected by some support. [20]

In May 1898, Secondo Pia, a Turin lawyer, took some photographs of the Shroud, and the result was an absolute shock: it became evident, for the first time, that the sheet acted like a photographic negative. That pale, indistinct, yellowish image perceived by the naked eye, is changed by photography into a clear, hyper-realistic picture, full of striking detail. The image is indelible, it has not been painted on and it is not due to any kind of dye. There is no trace of brushstrokes. The sepia colour is due to the fact that the thin surface linen fibres have yellowed thanks to a process of oxidation, dehydration and conjugation of the cellulose molecules that make up linen threads; the phenomenon only affected the fibre itself to an infinitesimal depth (125 micron), leaving the rest untouched, so that the image cannot be seen from the back of the cloth. In about a century of studies, hundreds of analyses and experiments had been carried out, among them many intended to duplicate the image through various techniques. Scientists started very early to try and produce new "Shrouds" by various devices, managing only to produce copies that have, at most, a few of the original's very strange properties. These attempts are praiseworthy and indeed very useful so long as they are carried out scientifically, for they allow us to

discard fruitless procedures and channel energies towards more profitable directions; alas, it often happens that they are exploited for cheap and tawdry commercial ends, nothing less than swindles at the expense of a passionate public without the scientific education to defend itself from fraudsters. From time to time some occasional writer will emerge out of nowhere, fabricate a dirty rag, and write a book of sensational revelations accompanied by much advertising.[21]

One of these mystifications even claimed to prove that the Shroud bore the image of the last Grand Master of the Templars, Jacques de Molay. This barely deserves my time to mention it; the reader's intelligence can judge it for itself. Jacques de Molay was burned at the stake on a small island in the Seine, in Paris, at sunset on 18 March 1314. His body was reduced to ashes, and we know from an eyewitness that the commoners of Paris fought to take away some of the ashes from that pyre, which they regarded as the mighty relics of a saint. And another thing: when he died, Jacques de Molay was about 64, at a time when old age began at 60, and had spent his last seven years in the horrors of Philip the Fair's dungeons. The man whose imprint was left in the shroud was indubitably young and strong, no more than 40.[22]

The advances of IT have recently allowed new directions to such studies, making possible kinds of images that were once not so much as conceivable. It has been discovered that the Shroud is not even a photograph. Unlike photographs, the image contains three-dimensional information within itself. It is a kind of optical projection, reminiscent of holography in some ways. It is certain that the image has been formed after the end of the flow of blood, so that the Shroud carries no image beneath the bloodstains. The new frontier of research points in the direction of certain theories that seem particularly probable. The most studied concerns the effect of a very strong and very short (a few hundredths of a second) burst of radiation, capable of leaving an impression on the cloth and oxidize its fibres without however burning them; that model would explain many things that otherwise find no reason to exist, for instance that the intensity of the image was derived by the distance it was from the body. Many hypotheses have been made over time about the formation of the very strange image of that man; the fact remains however that no scientist has thus far managed to reproduce an object with the same features as the Shroud. The phenomenon remains unknown. The various attempts to explain, though scientifically very important, remain purely theoretical models.

New hypotheses have also recently been opened concerning the controversial radio-carbon dating. The physicist Christopher Bronk Ramsey, director of the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit – that is, one of the three labs that had

been given the task of dating the shroud – has said the carbon dating test should be re-evaluated. In an interesting recent interview with the BBC, he has clarified how far technology has progressed since the start of the test on the Shroud, and today the method seems far more trustworthy than before. The procedure is based on measuring the amount of carbon left on an archaeological find to be dated. Carbon is an element found in every organic matter, and diverse varieties of it exist; the most widespread in living matter (equal to 98.89%) is made of atoms whose nucleus is made of six protons and six neutrons, but there are also different types such as carbon 13 (whose nucleus bears six protons and seven neutrons) and, exactly, carbon 14, whose nucleus is made of six protons and eight neutrons. Both carbon 13 and carbon 14 are isotopes of the most widespread kind, and C14 is unstable, that is naturally radioactive: as time goes on, it slowly disintegrates, and during this process it lets out an electron and a neuter particle (neutrino). C14 is found in the atmosphere, and all living beings continuously absorb it; when the organism dies, absorption ceases and its remains start slowly losing the radio-carbon which is no longer being reintegrated. Looking at the speed of decay of C14 over time, and if it is possible to measure how much C14 is left in a certain find, then it is possible to work how long ago the organism from which that find comes from died: for instance, it is theoretically possible to go back to the period when the fibre used to make a cotton cloth was harvested. But though its working principle is quite simple in and of itself, its measurement turns out to be extremely complex. With the old method we had to measure the atoms decayed in a given period of time, making sure not to include into the measurement other atomic decays that are present but have nothing to do with the test (for instance, background radiation in the environment). There is a second method to make the count, but neither is wholly foolproof; indeed, every measurement has a built-in margin of doubt, and many possible interferences may alter the result.[23] It is very rare that an archaeological find remains free from contact with the world after it has been made; in general, objects come into contact with people or substances just because they are used. Our fathers had an excellent habit of recycling objects several times over, practically until they utterly wore out. Even the very rich never threw anything away: a mediaeval lady's dress would be inherited by her daughter, and eventually perhaps presented to a church that got a priest's liturgical vestments out of it. When it really was too worn for any use, it was cut up for household rags; and when the rags were beyond use, they were still used to make paper.

That cotton cloth we used as an example may have passed through any amount of incarnations: worn, dyed with vegetable or animal dyes, used to clean

the household, to make the stopper of an amphora of oil proof against leaks, maybe even as swaddling clouts for a new-born baby: each of which brought it into contact with other living beings or other organic material, and each time it might have absorbed C14 of alien origin. In actual fact, radio-carbon is only one of many scientific methods used to try and date a find; it is neither better nor worse than the others, and indeed in some situations it proves wholly unsuitable. Experts in the field know famous tales of C14 dating with absurd, even ludicrous results; for instance, the prehistoric site at Jarmo was tested four times and had four different results, starting with 4,700 BC, then 10,000 BC, again 7,000 BC and finally 6,000 BC. Some primitive caribou bone tools from Old Crown, Alaska, were carbon-dated, and turned out to be from 27,000 years ago; the experts, unhappy with the result because the archaeological exam suggested a much more recent date, went into the matter in more depth – and found that the dating came from material from the external part of the bone, and testing again the internal, possibly less contaminated, part, the result was a much more modest 1,350 years earlier. No doubt the most amusing case was the one that struck the laboratory at Tucson, Arizona: a helmet from a Viking tomb – a well-researched kind of site whose dating and typology can be generally guessed with some accuracy – whose every other aspect asked to have it dated to the 10th century AD, but the radio-carbon test informed the scientists that the cow whose horns decorated the helmet was yet to be born! These are of course paradoxical cases, which are however very useful to scientists, because they show how easy it is to go monumentally off the trail even when you are using the finest technology available. You may carry out the test in the most textbook fashion, but the absence of essential data can totally compromise the result. [24]

Doubts had been gathering over the Shroud's C-14 dating almost from the moment the results were published. Some denounced the whole procedure as approximate and lacking in scientific rigour. Even scientists outside the fray had noticed that the approach had been, to say the least, unusual: no notes or minutes had been taken during the collection of samples, which laboratories always do because all kinds of unexpected things can happen during the work and must later be taken into consideration; the specific weight of the samples taken (300 mg) was nearly double the Shroud's average specific weight for that surface (161 mg), whereas, it being the same cloth, it should have been more or less identical; finally, more samples had been taken behind closed doors and without notifying the scientific community, and in fact in following years the results of exams carried out on threads and fragments of the Shroud, which according to the agreements should not even have existed, have kept popping up here and there. Besides the genuine professional rivalries between the laboratories concerned,

who were keen to be awarded the examination, other interests appear to have come into play. The controversy surrounding the tests eventually turned into something akin to a thriller rather than a scientific test; it is therefore not surprising that several books were written about this incredible story. [25]

Today the international scientific community is inclined to believe that if there were any errors, they were due to a technology still too unripe to hope to date such a complex object. Much of the Shroud's history is still unknown, we have no idea what contaminations it may have suffered; to know the manipulations suffered by a find proves vitally important to carry out a reliable test. It is not a hard concept to understand: an analysis of urine which uses a contaminated test tube is not valid. We only know the detail of the Shroud's history for the last 650 years or so: so many imponderables lurk in its past that radio-carbon testing seems still inappropriate, and we seriously risk cutting it away piece by piece before any really reliable test is developed. A significant example is the presence of a bioplastic coating on the linen fibres, due to the activity of a bacterium, which contaminated the sample and might well have "rejuvenated" the linen with extra helpings of C14 that had nothing to do with the Shroud. The bioplastic coating was only discovered years after the 1988 test, and obviously the test did not take into account its presence, and the contamination it carried. [26]

How many other contaminating agents could be present in the cloth even today, with us still knowing nothing of them?

The continuous progress of science leads us to hope that in a few years new dating techniques may be developed, more refined and above all, less destructive. They are badly needed: every square millimetre of Shroud that is destroyed is a loss of great value as it cannot be examined by our successors, who will surely have measuring tools which are more advanced than ours.

Meanwhile the hair area is being investigated with particular care: thanks to it, it is thought that the idea that the image was formed by contact should be excluded. The hair would then have looked crushed, whereas it is soft and flowing, as if free from any pressure.

Mysterious traces of writing

In 1978 the chemist Piero Ugolotti was examining a negative of the Shroud drawn from some photos taken some ten years earlier. He noticed some marks that decidedly leapt to the eye: they were not like stains, or if they were, they

seemed to have a curiously neat geometry, all orientated in the same way, closely reminiscent of alphabetic characters, and what is more they appeared to be arranged in groups. In short, they looked very much like written words.

The history of writings on the Shroud began that day 30 years ago, and is still taking place: in this book I shall only give a brief notice, otherwise the argument would take us too far along the paths of Syria-Palestine in the days of the Second Temple, within Roman-age Judaism, and we shall be forced to deal with issues too distant from the story of the Templars. At any rate, the presence of this writing, and in particular some of them in Jewish characters, is not without importance even for the purposes of our argument, since it may help us to understand why the Templars ever chose to keep the Shroud secret in the crucial historical moment when it reached them.

Piero Ugolotti had managed to clearly distinguish the outlines of some Greek and Latin letters, but even though he was an educated person, he did not want to risk trying to read them alone and preferred to entrust it to a specialist: Aldo Marastoni, teacher of ancient literature at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, who had edited important editions of Seneca and other Latin authors for the prestigious Bibliotheca Teubneriana of the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin. [27] Marastoni identified the letters at once, but he also saw other things that captured his interest; so he asked for new negatives from the Centro Internazionale di Sindonologia di Torino, the most illustrious and respected institute of Shroud studies. Having obtained the negatives, the two set to work: these traces of writing can only be seen thanks to the contrast of clear and dark tones in the photo, so it is necessary to develop it several times and make several photocopies to make the letters stand out as much as possible. The result was electrifying: on the Shroud were traces of Greek, Latin and even Hebraic writing. These are not characters written directly on the sheet, but on a different object, that had been partially transferred to the cloth: looking directly at the Shroud – which, we remember, behaves like a negative – almost nothing could be distinguished, while on the negatives (which return the realistic image of a man as if it were the positive or photograph itself), the characters become recognisable.

As was natural, considering the context, imagination went straight to the words of the Gospels: Pilate had had a placard placed on the cross of Jesus which spelled out the reason for his conviction, the famous *titulus crucis*. The three synoptic texts (Mark, Matthew and Luke) mention the fact briefly, quoting only the actual cause why the heads of the Sanhedrin and the scribes had denounced Jesus to the Roman procurator, presenting him as a rebel leader who had proclaimed himself "the King of the Jews"; the gospel of John on the other

hand gives a longer and more detailed account:

And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. (John 19, 19-20).

But immediately after the understandable early rush of enthusiasm, the situation struck Marastoni as very strange, maybe even disappointing: in effect, what can be read on the Shroud does not answer the Gospel description, because essential details reported by the Gospel of John are missing, while alien items with nothing to do with the Gospels are present. Above the right eyebrow (left in the negative), Marastoni points out the presence of at leas three characters in square Jewish writing: a taw, a waw or iod, then a mark that seems to him a zade (corresponding to the sound *ds*) in the form used only at the end of a word, then another rather confused character that appeared as if it could be the *soph pasu*, an interpunction comparable to a modern full stop. He takes them for parts of some word in Hebraic or Aramaic, which, however, does not coincide with the description of the writings stuck on Jesus' cross according to the Gospels. In the centre of the forehead, he reads the sequence of Greek characters IBEP, and in particular the group IB, which seems to him repeated immediately close by, parallel, but slightly shifted rightwards. Marastoni immediately thinks that the sequence might be the remnant of the name TIBEPIOS written in Greek, a name popular among Romans since the Etruscan age and used by several Emperors, of whom the first, the adopted son of Augustus, reigned just in the years when the Gospels place the death of Jesus (14-37 d.C.). The discovery recalls another that took place in 1979 thanks to Francis L. Filas SJ, a theologian from the St. Ignatius University of Loyola, Chicago: within the print of the right eye socket a small circle can be noticed, and within that, a few tiny letters. The sequence identified after a series of enlargements is UCAI, and forms an arch around a curious form not unlike shepherd's crook carried by bishops. Filas carried out patient research and found that those marks correspond to a particular coin coined by Pontius Pilate during his governorship of Judaea, from 26 to 36 AD. The legend on this coin bears a strange grammatical error, which is anything but unusual in Roman provinces; here Greek was spoken by the people, being a kind of universal language everyone knew, but it was full of incorrect grammar and

dialect forms that made it quite unlike the language spoken in Athens.[28] The Greek text TIBEPIOU KAICAPOS ("Tiberius Caesar") came out wrong, written as TIBEPIOU CAICAPOS. The sequence UCAI corresponds to the central part of this legend.[29]

Marastoni feels that these signs were written on some object placed on the convict's head. It may have been a mitra infamiae, a kind of crude and light hood, made for instance with material or papyrus, on which outrageous sentences were written for the exact purpose of humiliating the convict; the slight shifts of this hood might have caused the double imprint of the characters IB on the forehead, which otherwise needs explaining. The professor also saw two more Latin texts that ran vertically along the left cheek (right on the negative) parallel to each other. The biggest one showed a series of letters that seemed to him to form the sequence NEAZARE, with the Z written in reverse, and the other written, in smaller characters, INNECE, what is left of the Latin expression in necem ("to death"); even further down, in the lower quarter, he saw again a Latin capital T, and just under the chin a strange sign that seems made from two capital N's joined together. Meanwhile an IT expert, Aldo Tamburelli, tried to subject the Shroud to a recently designed test, and had thus discovered another surprising feature of the picture, the fact that it is threedimensional: even though it behaves like a photograph, the image does not come from a procedure like that of photography, because photographs are twodimensional.

Marastoni got in touch with Tamburelli and wished to verify whether the writing was still visible on the three-dimensional elaboration of the Shroud: the result was not only positive, but thanks to IT applications, the characters could be read much better.[30]

The term NEAZARE seems right away a very likely deformation of an original NAZAPENOS found both in Mark and in Luke; it is the adjective for Jesus' geographical origin, "inhabitant of Nazareth".[31] The group INNECE also seems highly pertinent in the context: it is Latin, it means "to death", and it is clear that the Shroud covered, exactly, a victim of the death penalty. Finally, Marastoni noticed another piece of writing in the negatives of some photographs taken in 1931, quite clear and articulate this time: it is a little above the knee, it is built around a cross, and to judge by its lines it seemed traced with a quill and ink on some different support (such as papyrus or parchment) that touched the linen. The fragments of the words it was made of (ISSIE, ESY, SNCT, I SERE,

STR) were immediately identified by the professor of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart with a Latin prayer (*Iesu sanctissime Miserere nostri*, "Most Holy Jesus, have mercy on us"): the form of the letters is rudimentary Gothic, and its presence corresponds quite well to the widespread mediaeval usage of placing notes written on paper or parchment with prayer formulas over relics, to make them into relics as well, by virtue of the belief that they could soak up the same spiritual power through contact. Considering the age suggested by the shape of the letters, as far as they can be estimated, this prayer-bearing paper might well have been made by none other than the Templars.

Captions?

In 1994, Marcel Alonso and Éric de Bazelaire, two members of the Centre International d'Études sur le Linceul de Turin in Paris, decided to start over again on the matter of the writings, and see whether the technologies developed in the meantime could offer any extra contribution. They also decided to go to specialists, and took the problem to the scientists of the Institut d'Optique Théorique d'Orsay, near Paris, a greatly respected research centre where some physicists who specialise in treating images work, among other things, on the identification of writing in palimpsests and other unreadable texts.[32]

A team of experts in signal analysis was assembled, led by André Marion, a researcher of the Cnrs and professor in the Institut d'Optique; over seven months, between May and December 1994, they studied the most suitable procedure to deal with the problem, then in January 1995 André Marion and his colleague Anne-Laure Courage presented the results of their long work to a conference. All around the face of the executed man who had left his image on the linen of the Shroud there were at least five separate words in Greek and Latin, to which must be added, at least three series of single characters.[33] Along the left side of the face (right on the negative) two parallel vertical sequences were identified, one in Latin characters INNECE (inside and near the cheekbone) and the other in Greek, NAZAPENOS (more outside). These are the same words seen by Marastoni, but the second is corrected: the computer does not make it NEAZARE but NAZAPENOS, and both its N's seem made in the same funny way, as two Ns bound together, which Marastoni had already identified inside INNECE and as an isolated mark beneath the chin, which was also confirmed. But there was more: still in the same area, a little further down beneath the isolated sign of the two joint N's, a sentence could be read which

Marastoni had not read, and which seemed utterly to the point: it is the group HSOY, immediately recognised as the central part of the word (I)HSOY(S). It is the Greek name of Jesus, and together with the other Greek word, says nothing but "Jesus of Nazareth".

Vertically along the left cheekbone two more words, also in parallel, could be read, the one outside in larger characters, the other inside in smaller but in fine relief: the first showed the group in Greek characters: S, separated by some blank space as if it were the ending of a word, then a sequence of three signs of which KI seemed quite clear while the last is dubious and might make one think of an A. The smaller writing still in Greek, said PEZ, and had the singular quality of appearing clear over the negative while the others appeared dark, so it must have been made with a different ink or material. As for the isolated clusters, Marion and Courage picked out, above the head, nearly at the centre but shifted somewhat to the right side, a sequence which seemed to them to be formed by the characters IC (which in Latin stand for i and *k*, in Greek *i* and s); near NAZAPENOS they could see the cluster ARE a second time, and the two items of writing are one above the other, as if the same text had been attached twice to the linen at different times, leaving two distinct marks at almost the same point. Further outside and with the same orientation, they also read a cluster of four signs, of which the first three (in Greek characters, A.A) are clear, while the last (which seems to the French scientists like an U or maybe a rounded M) was covered by some sort of stain; finally, still near the word NAZAPENOS, but further below and orientated upside-down, the signs SB appeared.

At this point we have to attempt to interpret. Marion and Courage had submitted the writings to some experts in disciplines to do with ancient and mediaeval history, a real roster of famous names working at the Sorbonne and other prestigious institutions.[34] The two parallel writings, HSOY(S) and NAZAPENOS hardly seemed to give great problems: they were nothing tougher than the Greek for the name *Jesus of Nazareth*, with a small variant as compared to the standard Gospel spelling, that is the vowel *Eta* (that is H) instead of *Epsilon* (that is E), and thus ended up being NAZAPHNOS. The confusion between these two vowels was a very common feature of the Roman-age Middle East, and is so widespread in written Greek of that period that epigraphic catalogues hardly even mention it among the peculiarities. The sequence INNECE offers no difficulties either, given that the context involves an executed man; while the identification of the remaining clusters (several fragments of words) seemed tougher and less obvious. As for the purpose these words were meant to serve, on the other hand, the two physicists received no agreed opinion,

for theories were many. One of the most interesting suggests that these words were written on a reliquary or on some kind of container: they were a kind of caption, whose traces were inadvertently transferred on to the sheet. Most recently, another signals analysis expert, the Frenchman Thierry Castex, has applied the same method perfected by Marion and Courage, and managed to identify new traces of Hebraic characters in the area under the chin, which he was kind enough to send to me for a second opinion; this is the first time that, with his permission, they are mentioned in print. Among the visible marks it seems possible to distinguish the characters mem, sade and aleph, corresponding to the root *ms*, which is found in both Hebraic and Aramaic and means "to find"; there is also a second sequence of two marks that might be nw or ky, given their similar shapes and the objective difficulties in reading. The whole might then be nw ms' ("we have found") or else ky ms', "because found".[35] It seems rather an interesting question: those words, torn off from a longer sentence, correspond exactly to a passage of the Gospel according to Luke to do with the trial of Jesus. To be precise, it is Luke 23.2, when the High Priest and the Sanhedrin deliver Jesus to Pontius Pilate, with a precise charge: "We found this man subverting the nation, forbidding to pay tax to Caesar, and saying that he himself was Christ, a king". Besides, a 1989 study by Roberto Messina and Carlo Orecchia had pointed out more Hebrew characters in the area of the forehead.[36]

Byzantine tradition has no trace of these strange scattered writings on the Shroud, and to the question whether they might be the Templars' work, the answer must be, no: only the small area with the inscribed prayer Most holy Jesus, have mercy on us, corresponds to their time. The experts consulted by Marion and Courage agree that nearly all the Greek and Latin passages were carried out long before the foundation of the Order of the Temple, indeed that they seem to go back to the early Christian age, to about the first to third centuries AD. These were devotional writings made by some believer to clarify who was that man whose image was left, or maybe scrolls with some legal value – that is, documents to be kept – as a hypothesis of Grégoire Kaplan's once suggested.[37]

The trace of Hebraic writing leads us to think that they were carried out in Syria-Palestine (or Qumran?) at a very early age. Everything rejects the suggestion that they might have anything to do with the Templars. It may be that the Temple brothers noticed their existence, as will be said below: and if so, that will have encouraged them to keep the Shroud strictly to themselves.

In the view of many experts who have long studied the Shroud of Turin, the image is growing less vivid as time goes on, on account of the natural degradation due to the effects of light, and in past centuries it could be seen more neatly; in effect, some ancient representations of the Shroud show the imprint in a much more intense tint of sepia, although we cannot exclude that the painters may have reinforced their colour to make the idea stand out better. When starting their research, André Marion's team of physicists chose to work from certain negatives shot by Enrie in 1931, both because the analogue photographs of the time carried an enormous amount of information, and because there is a suspicion that the image may then have been noticeably more intense than today, and so much richer in detail. The hints of writing may be recognised just because of the contrast of tone against tone, because they are like so many ivory-coloured stains in the shape of letters against the light sepia background of the image. In order to see them today we have to make use of photographic negatives, which play up contrasts greatly; but if the scientists are right and the image was once darker, maybe some writings could be seen with the naked eye, too. This is not a matter of small importance, if we take into account the social history of the Middle Ages; the words in Greek and Latin would not have been an issue, but the same absolutely could not be said for the Jewish characters.

Relationships between the Jews and political power in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages were variable. After the edict of Milan of 313 AD, Constantine vigorously promoted the growth of Christianity, and certainly did not favour the Jews, but decades later, when the whole empire was essentially Christian, Theodosius I (379-395 AD) issued a series of decrees for the protection of this minority, which was by then no threat to his religious policy. In the West, the Popes often protected them: especially Gregory I the Great, who designed a clear and permanent strategy to defend them from their enemies, by which must be meant essentially the local authorities and the local populace. We have no less than six letters from this Pontiff condemning acts of violence and chicanery against Jews, and we know that the communities scattered in the countries of the Christian world would often turn to the Rabbi who led the Roman community to intercede with the Pope, so that the latter could help as a political mediator with kings and emperors. The most famous of these letters, titled Sicut Iudaeis, was later repeated in following centuries by many Popes: its basic concept had already been stated by Emperor Theodosius I, and yet it was extremely difficult for it to enter the mind of the commons: "There is no law to forbid the Jewish religion".[38]

From the beginning to the end of the Middle Ages, Europe was shaken by frequent bouts of anti-Semitism, acts of hard-to-imagine violence arising spontaneously among the public because of a widespread hostility born of intolerance, which rulers, be they popes, emperors or kings, always tried to uproot, for it was a threat to public order. It was however in the lower Middle Ages that the question took alarming proportions. tarting from about 1150, and even more in the 1200s and 1300s, waves of anti-Semitism followed each other, causing slaughter. A spectre rose from the dim past, the spectre of a very ancient popular tale: Jews kept a Christian boy hostage for one whole year, fed him abundantly to fatten him up; then, when he was properly plump and ready, had killed him and eaten his flesh during one of their sacrilegious ritual banquets. This macabre fable was already doing the rounds of the Roman empire in the days of the pagan philosopher Celsus (II century AD) it was used indifferently against Christians and Jews by the pagan populace, who felt disgust at oriental usages of theirs such as circumcision. When it came back into fashion a thousand years later, it found particularly fertile ground, and spread with devastating effect. In 1144, the body of a boy murdered by an unknown person was found in Norwich; the local Jews were immediately blamed, and wiped out. Some 20 years later, a rumour swept Gloucester that a youth called Harald had been first barbarously tortured and then even crucified by Jews. From then on, cases multiply as in the beginning of an epidemic: in Bury St. Edmunds, Bristol and Winchester in the last years of the 12th century, then in the first of the 1200s in Lincoln, Stanford and London. From England, the legend crossed over to France, spreading its vicious spell everywhere: it was as though any tragic and not very clear event had necessarily to be the fault of the Jews. As early as 1171 the evidence of one of these "ritual murders" had been thought to have been found in Pontoise. The victim was buried in Paris, in the church of the Holy Innocents; rumours spread that the young man had performed many miracles, and many people took to making pilgrimages to the tomb of this boy, seen as a martyr of "Jewish perfidy". Even a special rite was written to honour him. In the same year, Thibaut, Count of Blois, had no less than 32 Jews burned at the stake on account of this legend, and the local community; while on the other hand his neighbour Thibaut IV, Count of Flanders, like King Louis VII of France and Emperor Henry VI, all proclaimed officially that the tale had no real basis, and tried to uproot it – alas, with no success. During the 1200s, the dark legend spread the length and breadth of Europe, and was easily believed by a credulous populace. Its hold on the imagination was so strong that it developed a new and hideous feature: Jews needed human blood to make the unleavened bread they ate during their Paschal rites.[39]

In 1235 there was a notorious case in the German city of Fulda. The Jews were charged with the murder of a miller's five sons, and were subjected to torture so horrendous as to force them to "confess" that the unleavened Easter bread was really made by using human blood. The result was another mass murder. The episode resonated so widely that it reached, and concerned, the Emperor Frederick II. A man of immense learning, and amazingly broad-minded for his age, Frederick was very familiar with Oriental customs. Having been brought up in Sicily, where Muslims still lived, he had spent time incognito as a child with a Muslim family who took him and hid him to protect him from his enemies. The Emperor was very skeptical on the matter; since however the legend had such a firm hold of the mind of the commons, he decided to nominate an expert commission made up of Jews who had converted to Catholicism to make an accurate and in-depth study of the problem. Obviously the experts proved that the Old Testament forbids absolutely the eating of blood, even that of animals killed for food. Frederick II thought he would solve the problem for good by associating the persecutors of Jews with those guilty of lese-majesty, the most serious and most terribly punished of all crimes. And yet in the same year the communities of Lauda and Pforzheim had carried out more slaughters; Pope Gregory IX had to issue a new version of the BullSicut Iudaeis in which he ordered the Bishops of France to severely punish Christians who made themselves guilty of violence against the Jewish population or their property.

Just in those years, one of the most violent persecutions burst out, and it is thought that as many as 2,500-3,000 Jewish persons were murdered by the crusaders who were taking part in the Sixth Crusade, including women and children, while hundreds more were baptized by force. This may have been the moment of highest tension: exacerbated by the spread of heresy and religious contestation, the Church started to condemn traditional Jewish books such as the *Talmud*, which was not properly a sacred text but contained some disrespectful passages about Jesus which had come from popular literature. Hate of Jews fed on the notion that Jews deliberately profaned the Eucharist. The rumour had spread that Christian wet-nurses hired by rich Jews to feed their babies, who took Communion on Easter day, were forced to throw their milk into the toilet for three days afterward to stop the Eucharist contaminating the little new-born Jew through the milk. There were more than 50 accounts of profaning Jews who had taken consecrated hosts by deceit and had suddenly seen them turn to flesh and blood in their hands.

By the mid-twelve hundreds, Pope Innocent IV allowed himself to be conditioned enough by these notions to approve the decree of expulsion passed by the archbishop of Vienne against the Jews in his diocese; this was in fact a very rare case, since the Popes kept publishing Bulls in defence of the Jewish population, which the public regularly ignored, because the prejudice was so rooted in the popular mind as to be invincible. By the end of the century, expulsions became mass phenomena: in 1290 it was the turn of the Jews of England, then in 1306 those of France, by order of Philip the Fair. Between 1298 and 1337, Germany saw a simply monstrous wave of anti-Jewish mania: 150 local communities were destroyed because of this chit-chat about desecrated Hosts, and historians calculate that these horrors resulted in the murder of between 20,000 and 100,000 Jews.[40]

This was the climate in which the Templars, in all likelihood, gained possession of the Shroud. Most Templar monks were rather on the ignorant side, but some of the leaders were well educated. Traces of writing surely could not be noticed by pilgrims rushing by in front of the relic and kept at a safe distance, but maybe a careful, precise and prolonged exam could still perceive them. If any of the brothers had realised that the sheet carried Jewish writing, as is not at all impossible, we would have an even better reason why the Temple leadership chose to keep utterly silent about the relic. And the order simply could not afford to lose it; for certain reasons, it regarded it as a necessary bulwark against an evil that was affecting the whole of Christianity. An evil with most ancient roots, that had been finding a few victims even in the Temple.

Keep the path of Peter

In 1143 abbot Erwin of Steinfeld informed St. Bernard of Clairvaux that members of a peculiar heretical sect had been arrested in the neighbourhood of Cologne: they declared themselves member of an ancient Church which had remained hidden since the days of the martyrs, which had survived in Greece and other countries under the leadership of some "Apostles" and bishops. From the second half of the 12th century to the end of the 13th, Christian society was shaken to its foundations by the unprecedented proliferation of a movement of religious dissent which not only challenged a number of fundamental dogmas and the Church's tradition, but associated theological protest with forceful accusations against the corruption of the clergy and vigorous political demands. [41] In this shaky climate, the relics and objects to do with Jesus' earthly life were to the Church something like a saving anchor, something that could help Christians not to drift off after the latest faddish doctrine. It was a matter of staying within the beaten track, the track that had once been opened by the

Apostles.

Shortly before his death, the old fisherman from Bethsaida in Galilee, Shimon a.k.a. Peter, had dictated to his disciples a letter which they then composed and dispatched to every Christian community that could be reached, like an actual encyclical. The letter expressed certain serious concerns of his recommended that Christians should stay away from some recent theories that gave a merely intellectual and spiritual portrayal of Jesus, as if here were no more than the symbol of the complete renewal of mankind at large. Modern historians call this religious current *docetism*, from Greek *dokèin* ("to seem"), because their teaching was based on the idea that Jesus had no more than the external appearance of a man. Their fault was placing too much emphasis on personal interpretation. Peter was not widely read, but those novels and sophisticated interpretations that were becoming so fashionable in Christian thought, no, he did not like them at all. For a start, they had their root not in Jewish religion but in neo-Platonic philosophy, that is the thought of pagan Greeks; what is more, they left the impression of extolling the spiritual face of Jesus to try to hide away the human face, as though being human were a weakness, something to be ashamed of. Above all, they were myths. Having followed him for three years, having seen in person the trial, the death, and the events that had followed, he kept a very concrete memory of him, and would not let the new generations imagine him as something like an abstract concept. His reaction against these new directions, so far as we know, was immediate and unreserved condemnation: Christianity meant to recognise that the Messiah of Israel was one and the same with the historical person Jesus of Nazareth, and since the Docetists refused the human being Jesus, in Peter's eyes, they were simply not Christian. f we want to place a modern label on it, the religion of Peter, like that of Paul and John, was a historical religion, in the sense that everything was born from certain fundamental facts precisely located in time and space. There had been one strong man who had done certain things, and the soles of his feet had left their prints on the earth of Jerusalem.

In the writing that Christian tradition handed down as the Second Epistle of Peter, the old fisherman warned against the dangers that could arise when the claim was made to interpret the Gospels in too free and personal a manner. Against all personal constructs in the matter of Jesus, Peter raised a simple and immediate truth, that is, what he had seen:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty [...]. knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of private interpretation.[42]

Eighty years after his death, things had gone far beyond, and many independent churches had spread, to which the human part of Jesus, the body, was not just secondary but negative, to be discarded. They tended to feel that it was impossible that the Spirit of God, of whom the celestial Christ had been forged, could remain caged in a human body that fell sick and died; so Christian thinking was tending to suppose that the Spirit had at some point taken possession of this mortal detritus in order purely to communicate with human beings, teach them the way of knowledge, only to then rid himself as soon as possible of this embarrassing physical carrier, before it was undone by crucifixion. These churches called themselves Gnostic, from the Greek word gnosis, knowledge, because according to their religious views, the salvation of man depended not from Jesus' sacrifice, which had never really taken place, but from his preaching alone, thanks to which men came to the knowledge of God. Docetic and Gnostic currents would strongly separate the earthly Jesus from the heavenly Christ, as if they were two separate and irreconcilable entities. The mortal Jesus, the Jesus of Nazareth, was an empty and irrelevant container of no importance, the temporary abode of the spiritual Christ; to some sects, he was just another man, to others not even a man of flesh and bone, but some sort of ectoplasm. To both, at any rate, the Resurrection had never happened, because the heavenly Christ could neither suffer nor die; there had been no sacrifice to redeem mankind, and the Eucharist was a meaningless ritual and so should not be celebrated. God had sent this celestial Messenger of his among men under the false appearance of a mortal man, of a commonplace individual, so that he could preach to mankind and so redeem it from their false opinions; the physical baggage of the Messenger was nothing but a kind of visual delusion needed so that people could see him, but of no real consistency. Certain extremist Gnostic groups went as far as to say that it had actually been Simon of Cyrene who had been crucified: for at the right moment God had as though dazzled the soldiers, to force them to get the wrong man. [43]

Apart from these exaggerations, the Gnostic movement had its own fascinating theology which exalted the spiritual greatness of the Christ and celebrated the way in which the human soul, through his mediation, carried out a great path of ascesis till it came to contemplate the face of God. From the end of the first century till the age of Constantine, even Catholic Christianity was more than once attracted by this intellectual and spiritual vision of Jesus, which

underplayed the value of his human nature and interpreted every bit of the gospels allegorically. Several representatives of these views moved constantly on the edge of orthodoxy, such as the theologian Valentinus, who had lived in Rome during the reign of Hadrian, of whom we are left a fragment of great religious poetry:

When the Father, the sole good being, tuns to it his glance, the heart is sanctified and shines with light; and so he is made blessed who has such a heart, for he will see God.[44]

Already from the end of the first century, Christians felt this kind of idea very keenly, and their attraction was reinforced by the fact that Gnostics lived exemplary ascetic lives. Valentinus had a special intuition, and he seemed to somehow have set into motion that theological debate which was later to ripen into the dogma of the Trinity. The beauty of his religious thought, joined as it was with an overwhelming power of eloquence, had let much of the clergy of Rome to propose him as a future Pope; something, however, had gone wrong, and in the another candidate, of no great theological gift, but who had given an impressive witness of faith in his daily life, had been elected instead. The reasons for this choice must be found in a peculiarity of Gnostic thought already denounced by St. Ignatius of Antioch, who had a major role in the Christian community in the reign of Trajan (98-117 AD): Gnostics neglect to help the poor, the sick, widows and orphans. That was the inevitable result of their theological apparatus: if flesh is nothing but sin and corruption, why cure the sick? If life is nothing but incarceration and exile, why help the poor live longer? In short, their exaggerated ascetic ideal made Gnostics pretty nearly inhuman. Jesus, on the other hand, had been very clear: following his path meant helping anyone who needed help, whatever the cost. The primitive Church had been, before it had been anything else, a group of religious volunteers made up of people who held their goods in common to feed the poor and care for the sick; there was no doubt that this was the will of Jesus, since this happened when he was still with the Apostles and had guided them. These sects interpreted the message of Christ as though it were pretty much a school of philosophy, and ignored charity to the needy. Even if they were pure of any stain, Gnostics ended up betraying the essence of Christianity. [45]

Disappointment at missing the Papacy caused Valentinus the theologian to develop a violent resentment against the Roman clergy; it seems that he left the

capital for the East, and that he started to write works widely different from what he had previously published, expounding aggressively Gnostic theories against the human body of Christ, which he had perhaps already worked out without ever making them public before. Peter's vision, which had handed down a cult of Jesus as the Christ announced by the prophets and still a man of flesh and bone, ended up prevailing, and Gnostic doctrines were refuted; Gnosis however did not altogether vanish, for its roots were deep both in the East and in the West. Modern historians have trouble seeing the differences between one sect and another, because notices are few and as often as not they come from contemporary Christian intellectuals, who had it in for those doctrines because of the confusion they sowed among the public: some leaders of major Gnostic schools had circulated heavily-edited versions of the gospels, or even gospels of their own writing and devising. The text of John, peculiarly full as it is of symbolic expressions, was their favourite target. [46]

There were great differences between one Gnostic school and another, although in the end they all went back to a common idea that basically denied the humanity of Christ. To the writers of the early Church, Gnosticism was like the hundred-headed hydra, a monster with ancient roots and yet everlastingly capable of turning up again with a new face. [47]

Survivals

Constantine had decided to legalise the Christian cult both out of personal sympathy and out of political calculation, but obviously he wished for a united and peaceful church, a solid organism that could serve his projects; he therefore outlawed dissident sects. Gnosis survived; especially in north Africa and some areas of the Middle East, it came back into favour in the time of the Manichees, one of whose members, in his youth, had been none other than St. Augustine of Hippo. During the Byzantine age, enclaves survived in various patches of the Empire's vast hinterlands; then the current picked up strength again inside the larger iconoclast movement, that intended to destroy icons because they bore the human image of Christ and it wished instead to worship only the gospels, which bore his word. In the centuries VIII and IX, several Byzantine emperors found themselves having to fight the Paulicians, so called because they followed the Gnostic doctrines of Paul of Samosata: Michael I (811-813), Leo V (813-820), Theodora (842-856), who outlawed Icon-smashing, and finally Basilius I, who defeated them in the year 871. Because these dissenters were excellent soldiers,

they had been settled in Thrace and Macedonia as a border shield to the Imperial territories; there the movement grew again and spread widely into Bulgaria, into the Balkans and in certain regions of Russia. By the middle of the 10th century, they had taken the name of *Bogomils*, from the name of their spiritual head Bogumil, which meant "Dear to God".

Like a returning wave, this stream of thought in which religious dissent tended to marry political protest during the 11th century, had reached the capital once again: in the time of the imperial house of the Komnenoi, Gnostic-derived heresy grew powerful, and merciless measures of repression were adopted. Anna Komnena, daughter of the Emperor Alexius I and author of a famous *Chronicle*, tells that in the year 1117 a kind of conspiracy was discovered, organised by the leaders of these Gnostic churches, whose reach had come as far as the verge of the Imperial throne and lurked among the most trusted officials. To deliver a really exemplary lesson, Alexius condemned them to be burned at the stake, but he had two different burning pits prepared: one overlooked by a Cross, the other not. The Cross was the mark of true faith, and to accept it meant to accept the real humanity of Jesus, his real and freely willed sacrifice, and all its beneficent effects for the salvation of human kind. Some of the heretics chose to die under the Cross; the Emperor took this for a sign of conversion on the point of death and granted them amnesty. [48]

In the 11th century, some members of the Gnostic Bogomil movement crossed over into Western Europe, taking their teaching with them, and it took hold very swiftly, especially in southern France, northern Italy and Germany. The Midi, that is the whole central and southern area of modern France, became the home of a swift-growing Gnostic church. In the year 1167 they even held a general council of this new independent church at Saint-Félix-de-Caraman in Languedoc; they called themselves the Cathars, from the Greek *katharòs*, meaning "pure". Several Catholic bishops adhered to it, going over to its particular creed and taking all their faithful with them, and a kind of union was agreed between the Western and Eastern Cathars; the leader of a Greek church, called *Niketas*, and who wore the significant title of *papas*, took part in the council.[49] A dangerous doctrinal confusion had also reached into the hierarchies of the Catholic Church; a theologian of the level of Pope Innocent III found himself forced to write a crop of letters and treatises addressed, not to ordinary people, but to bishops whose ideas seemed to be tottering on matters as central and basic as sacraments. At the same time, Innocent III expended a great deal of energy to underline the significance of the cult of relics, especially those that related to the life of Christ. Just as it had happened to the Byzantine Emperors Romanus I and Constantine VII when they found themselves facing

the heretics, he had understood an important point: these objects may well be poor things tied to popular devotion, but to tradition they represented the concrete evidence that Jesus had really lived as a human being, had suffered the Passion and had died. In the face of those who preached that the Celestial Christ had been a pure spirit, a concept, an abstract being, even relics of the most everyday things, even the milk of the Virgin, served as fundamental evidence for ordinary people, evidence that heretics considered not true.

As I already tried to explain, the truth of a relic is something our mental attitude cannot take in as the old world used to: the men of the Middle Ages, from the professor at the Sorbonne to the last beggar, perceived it with very great strength, and that cannot simply be ascribed to their stupidity. It is true that any amount of fakes circulated, and we know the famous quotation ascribed to Erasmus or Calvin, that one could load a whole ship with the wood from the relics of the true Cross of Christ scattered around Christendom. No doubt they were right, but mostly about the shocking abuse made of these objects in their time, to collect alms from pilgrims; and something of the kind was also violently denounced by a 12th century churchman, the Cistercian Abbot Guibert de Nogent. Both Guibert and Calvin or Erasmus were however neglecting a matter of some relevance to modern historians: if for instance the Emperor of Constantinople wished to make a gift to some church a piece of the True Cross, he would not hack off a large chunk, but rather shave of a minute part, often a bare sliver. The value of relics was spiritual, and did not depend on weight. The only thing that mattered was whether that wood had been drenched in the blood of Christ; whether it was a tiny fragment or the whole *patibulum* arm, it was still a witness of the Passion. Of course one could not exhibit to the prayers of the faithful some thin wooden fibre, impossible to see once it was sealed within the reliquary; so the holy fibre would be placed within a larger piece of wood, trying to select the same kind of material from which the original fragment had been taken. The more recent wood carrier became itself sacred by contact, and the sliver once inserted in it would be lost and become all but impossible to distinguish; but in all this there was no intent to deceive or defraud. Most relics of the Cross circulating in the Middle Ages were at least authentic in this sense, that is derived from an authentic lift of material from the greater relic that tradition said St. Helena had retrieved in Jerusalem.

The study of relics is a very fascinating chapter in the history of culture, so long as it is done with sufficient respect. For it is a matter of cultural processes that today's historian must be able to record without claiming to eviscerate them in the light of a realism that is both too recent in origin and too distant to properly judge. Besides, the modern world may well be said to have something

that looks very much like the ancient hunger for relics: it is the curiosity towards the so-called "historical Jesus", that is all the research that aims to reconstruct the human and terrestrial figure of Jesus of Nazareth in the most realistic manner possible. Born from Positivism, from relativism and also from a certain faddish 1900s scepticism, the culture of the early third millennium claims to be able to separate the historical man, a Galilean subject of Herod Antipas and of Tiberius Caesar, from the mysteries bound with his person which have made him the centre of a new religion. To do so, the Gospels are sometimes sliced like hams, dismantled and recomposed in different ways because it is hoped to be able to get back to the "actual words" spoken by Jesus.[50] I am not able to assess the sense of this on a theological level, but certainly as historical method it has none. A man who proposed to go to a conference on Dante and propose to move the Paolo and Francesca episode from Canto V of Hell to Canto V of Paradise would end up covered in obloquy. A historian finds such an idea unacceptable: it is like a crazed restorer intending to destroy a painting by Giulio Romano with acid because he is certain he shall find, hidden behind it, a sketch by Giulio's master Raphael. At any rate, even if it shows itself in paradoxical and laughable forms, the modern desire to reach the Jesus of history so as nearly to be able to look him in the face is actually very similar to mediaeval man's morbid affection for all the remains of his terrestrial passage.

Himself a lover of relics and certain that they were a mighty weapon against heresies, Innocent III wrote a hymn to celebrate the Veronica, a famous image of the Face of Jesus kept in Rome. Its tradition was tied up with the *mandylion's*: the Veronica was also an acheropita image, that is, a miraculous portrait not made by man. It was said to have been miraculously made when a compassionate woman had approached Jesus on the way to Golgotha, to clean his face, dripping with blood and sweat. [51] The Templars knew that this Pontiff loved, or rather itched, to collect Christ's relics, because of their meaning, and Popes who followed were just as eager. A famous case that may give a feeling for the times was that of the miracle in Bolsena cathedral, in 1263. A German priest who was going on pilgrimage to Rome was saying Mass on the altar of St. Christina, but at the back of his mind (like many priests of his time, perhaps) he felt a doubt about the Host being really the body of Christ. Suddenly he saw blood coming out of the bread, and dripping down to stain the corporal. The event, of course, made an enormous amount of noise, and Pope Urbanus IV ordered its memory to be celebrated with the feast of Corpus Domini. [52]

The order of the Temple owed everything to papal favour; what is more, as we already mentioned, its own statutes said in so many words that the Roman Pontiff was its lord and master. Once he had learned that the Templars kept such

a relic, there is every likelihood that the reigning Pope would have let the Grand Master understand that he wanted it in the Roman Curia. The Templars could not have said no; and it was probably also to ward off such a prospect that it was decided that it was best to keep silent.

In southern France, at the same time, a lethal association was arising between the Cathar religious ideal, followed by many with sincerity, and political opposition to the King. Philip II Augustus was working to unify the territory of his kingdom politically, so as to make it a stronger monarchy, and this obviously implied that the great southern fief-holders would lose their autonomy.[53] Besides, the north, the langue *d'oil*, was a very different culture from the south. The connection between ecclesiastic and political autonomy became very strongly felt, and was amplified by the unworthy lifestyle often enjoyed by Catholic hierarchs, as opposed to the exemplary austerity of Cathar bishops. The idea itself of heresy was recklessly broadened: to protest a bishop's authority, or to refuse to pay tithe, was counted as disobedience to the Catholic Church and evidence of support for the heretics.[54]

The opposition was thus animated by a certain reforming spirit that gave it a potent moral charisma and drove many people to Cathar churches. At first it was attempted to end the conflict with religious weapons alone, thanks in part to the fervid preaching activity of St. Dominic de Guzman; but this could not ward off the disaster. On 5 January 1208, the Papal legate Peter of Castelnau was murdered by a subject of the Count of Toulouse and his murder went unpunished: the murderer was tied to the Cathars, his lord seemed to be protecting him, and the whole matter was very suspicious. Whatever the truth, this crime was the spark that exploded the gunpowder store. Philip II Augustus promoted a true civil war that caused the massacre of thousands upon thousands of Frenchmen and the military conquest of Provence and above all of Languedoc. It was called the Albigensian crusade because one of the most tragic events of repression took place in a town called Albi, and because political propaganda demanded that this butchery be misrepresented as a crusade. The operation achieved its political goal, but did not manage at all to uproot the Cathar church of the Midi, which went on existing for over a century there and elsewhere: according to Raniero Sacconi, born and raised in a Cathar family but who later converted and joined the Dominicans, in 1251 the spread of this parallel church was stunning. It was still flourishing in the later twelve hundreds; the last leader of whom we hear, by name Guillaume Bélibaste, died at the stake in 1321.[55]

Curiously and surely not by chance, the area of Catharism's highest popularity agrees with that where we find the most numerous testimonies of these simulacra

of the Face of Christ among the Templars.

Between Provence and Languedoc

We know that at the time of the sack of Constantinople, when the Shroud vanished from the imperial collection, a small group of Templars were present in the Byzantine capital. Their leader was called Jacopo Barozzi, a knight from one of Venice's most prominent families, who at the time held the important office of Preceptor of the Temple for the province of Lombardy (meaning most of northern Italy). What they were doing there is not quite clear, and the only certain thing is that they were there under orders from the Grand Master. In fact, these Templars took no part in the sacking of the city, nor would they have been allowed to; for on the one hand Innocent III had excommunicated all those who had been guilty of aggression against other Christians, and on the other the Templar regulations themselves ordered that anyone who had been guilty of violence against other Christians was to be expelled from the Order, immediately and irrevocably.[56]

The Temple units were in fact already in the Holy Land, and had already committed themselves to the military operations which, according to the agreed plans, were to precede the retaking of Jerusalem; that is, strengthening the Christian positions in northern Syria. This little group, led by the Preceptor of Lombardy, left Venice together with the remaining Crusader army because, in all likelihood, the Venetian Templar house had given the French barons a massive cash loan to help them at last to leave, since the debt they had made with the Republic prevented the host from moving out. Immediately after the conquest of Constantinople, the new Latin Emperor, Baudouin de Courtenay, was to charge Barozzi with the most delicate and serious of diplomatic missions: go to the Pope and beg him to remove the sentence of excommunication from the leaders of the Crusade. On this occasion the new Emperor gifted the Temple with a small fortune in money, precious objects shining with gems, and even two fragments of the True Cross: wealth that was to repay the Order for the expenditure it had previously suffered. [57]

Was it Preceptor Jacopo Barozzi who passed the shroud from the imperial Byzantine collection to the Temple? The idea does not seem acceptable, because known sources do not support it; if anything, the horror of the sack and the indignity of the trade in relics that followed were what allowed the Templars to see the relic from close up and assess its awe-inspiring peculiarities. The

evidence that has come down to us does not place the Holy Face in the hands of the Order any earlier than several decades later, in 1266, near the tower of Saphed in Palestine, when the Sultan Baibars snatched it from the order and was greatly astonished to find a bas-relief of a man's face in the grand hall of the mansion, where the knights had used to hold their chapter, and obviously could not guess at the man's identity. [58] More or less at the same time, these simulacra started appearing in the mansions of southern France, especially in Provence; for some particular reason, the cult there spread sooner and faster than anywhere else. [59] The following decades witnessed a kind of explosion of copies, which meant that by the last quarter of the 13th century they could be found practically in every country where the Temple was present. [60] In Paris, the presence of the "idol" is continuously documented from 1298 to 1307, during the last general chapter that the Templars were able to hold only a few months before their arrest. In Cyprus, too, it seems to appear somewhat late. [61]

Provence may have been early, as compared with the rest of France, in the spread of the cult, on account of its strategic position, since Marseille was the main port of embarkation to *Outremer*; but there may also have been other reasons, issues connected with specific persons. A rumour that went around the order said that the unworthy acts practised in the Order's rituals (*errores*) had been introduced in the days when Thomas Bérard was Grand Master and Roncelin de Fos was Preceptor of Provence.[62] The Masters of this province seem to have had a privileged role in the spread of the cult; there are in fact no less than 19 witness statements that tie the idol continuously to the Preceptors of Provence and to their lieutenants[63] in the second half of the XIII century: Roncelin de Fos,[64] Pons de Brozet,[65] Guy Audémar,[66] and Bernard de La Roche.[67]

The sources ascribe the introduction to the cult precisely to Roncelin de Fos, and in a significant date: it is 1266, the year when the fortress of Saphed was taken from the Templars, and when the Sultan found that curious image of the Face carved into the chapterhouse wall. It is not hard to imagine that that same hall might also have kept another simulacrum of that same Face, taken to the West when the fortress fell into Muslim hands.

On Roncelin de Fos, unfortunately, we currently have very little information. Following Anne Marie Bulst-Thiele's very valuable study of the Templar Grand Masters, we find that Roncelin de Fos had a long career in the Order, which coincides with the period in which Thomas Bérard became Grand Master. In 1252-1255 and 1262-1266, Roncelin held the office of Master of England to which he added, in the periods 1248-1250, 1254-1256, 1260-1278 that of Master of Provence. [68] The man may however have been more important in the Order

than even his list of offices would seem to warrant; a document dated 1252 makes him, together with his kinsman Geoffroy de Fos, a member of the private company of Grand Master Thomas Bérard, that is of a narrow roster of dignitaries chosen by the leader as his most trusted collaborators. [69]

The Grand Master's companions who had to be noble; helped him closely in all most delicate situations, and in important matters such as lending Order funds could not be tackled by the Grand Master without their agreement. [70] In general, the rules describe these persons as being always close to the person of the Grand Master, so close indeed that in some cases it becomes necessary to specify which kinds of honours and privileges were an exclusive prerogative which the Grand Master was not allowed to share with his companions.[71] Belonging to the narrow circle of the Grand Master's companions, and the full confidence from the latter which this honour implies, surely allowed Roncelin de Fos the opportunity of taking part in the most confidential matters; and it seems that de Fos was the first to take the cult of the Shroud-type Face to the West. As a companion of the Grand Master, he certainly had access to plenty of information unknown to the ordinary brothers. In his dossier of charges, Philip the Fair specified that knowledge of the mysterious "idol" was an elite matter open only to the very highest ranks. If we remove what is there only to support basically groundless charges, we must notice that something of this statement is true.

From the sources, it seems that the cult did not cross the geographical boundaries of Templar Provence, at least in its early times. Outside Provence, we must go as far as 1270 for a sporadic apparition in Paris, and 1271 to see it represented on the seals of German Preceptors; on the other hand, documents show that the area under the command of Roncelin de Fos knew these simulacra early and widely. The three statements that refer directly to de Fos cover a long chronological arch, reaching probably to the end of his life; after him, his successor Pons de Brozet "inherited" the cult and forced its transmission to some brothers, as did the last Templars to hold this post. Concerning the physical presence of the figure, there is no evidence that it was ever kept in a single place: on the contrary, some witnesses said that it was entrusted to certain individuals, rather than being tied to one or more mansions. One of the persons mentioned as having a personal guardianship of the "idol" is none other than the Provencal officer Pons de Brozet.[72]

There is an important clue in the first statement that refers to the central mansion of the Paris Temple.[73] As already mentioned, the sergeant who had been shown the "idol" wondered at the fact that he had never seen it again after his ceremony of admission. Now, considering that he had been admitted a long

time before (1270) and that the presence of the "idol" is only proved in Paris for the continuous period from 1298 to 1307, it seems that showings depended not on the place but on people, that is, those who celebrated the ceremony of admission. It may have been mostly a matter of confidence, of trust in the man's moral fibre. The brothers were shown the idol at the start of their lives as Templars, the ceremony that made them order members; it is as if there were a purpose to place the new Templar forthwith under the protection of the order's great patron, who would then perpetuate his protection through the power of the strand consecrated by contact.

Amaury de La Roche

The last person we hear of having a personal connection with the "idol" is a figure of primary importance in the Temple of the mid-twelve hundreds; in some ways, at least on the international stage, he may have had more influence than the Grand Master himself. Amaury de La Roche belonged to a senior family of the French nobility, which had already given the Temple a Preceptor of France in the first half of the 13th century[74]; older by a generation than the Templar dignitaries tried by Philip the Fair, he had reached in 1261 a very prestigious rank among the Templars – Commander of Outremer, that is commander in chief over the whole Eastern sector. It was the third hierarchic rank in the whole order, and entitled him to counter-sign decrees issued by the Grand Master. The following year he still had that rank, but had added another of greater delicacy and importance: just like Roncelin de Fos exactly ten years earlier, in an act of 1262 Amaury de La Roche is mentioned as *compaignon* of the Master, Thomas Bérard.[75]

In 1264 the Grand Master summoned him back to France, saying in so many words that the situation in Occident called for his presence; the following year, the King of France set out on a kind of diplomatic campaign because he saw Amaury as a valuable man and absolutely did not want to lose the opportunity to have him as an ally. By the Popes' gift, the Order of the Temple had always been free to select its own leaders by vote and without any kind of outside interference. Templar statutes only allowed one exception, that is, where a Pope, for reasons of higher necessity, were to interfere and make his desires felt. Louis IX made use of this exception, and strongly pressured Pope Urbanus IV to

favour Amaury de La Roche's candidacy as Preceptor of France, a role which would have involved a great deal of cooperation with the Crown in many ways. The Pope had a hard time imposing his interference on the Templar assembly, which did not view this interference from the King of France as fair; on the other hand, the sovereign would not yield, he kept insisting, extolling Amaury as a person and underlining that that man was bound to him by a very old friendship. The Pope did not wish to displease a man of Louis IX's calibre: a just King, a faithful husband, of exemplary devotion, it certainly was not easy to say no. Besides, considering his wisdom, it was not hard to imagine that the choice of Amaury would have been a very sound step. In the end, Urbanus Urbano IV thought to seek for help from the Patriarch of Jerusalem, a religious and moral authority to whom the Templars were closely bound. Grand Master Thomas may well not have wanted to lose that man because he felt his need in the East; but in practice, the greatest powers in contemporary Christian society had aligned around the request to make Amaury de La Roche Preceptor of France: so he was forced to yield. The situation was to repeat itself later: Pope Urbanus' successor, Clemens IV, pressured the Grand Master no less than twice to place Amaury at Charles of Anjou's disposal, by giving him oversight of the Templar houses of the Kingdom of Naples.[76]

Although his specific duties were from then on focused on Western territories, Amaury de La Roche seems to have had, thanks to Louis IX's confidence, a role above his rank. Sources show him taking personal charge of Oriental issues, above all the new crusade that dominated the king's thoughts: in 1267 the Patriarch of Jerusalem turned to him, rather than to the Grand Master, to lament the persecution of the Palestine Christians at the hands of the Sultan of Egypt, and asked him to intercede with the Pope, King Louis, and Charles of Anjou, to intervene swiftly. [77] Amaury went on the Eighth Crusade with the French King, and took part in the siege of Tunis [78]; it seems likely that the King's death in 1270 interrupted his rise in the Temple, for according to the last notice that still mentions him as living, a reception he held in Paris in 1287, he was still Master of France. [79]

This man's life intersects at many points with the story of the Shroud as it has been reconstructed so far. He had the full confidence of Louis IX, who set up a whole policy of searching to take to France the most important relics of Jesus left in Constantinople, and had a container of fantastic value, the sublime jewel that is the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris, built especially for them: the True Cross, the Spear, the Sponge used to give drink to the crucified Jesus, and other priceless objects, were solemnly transported to France in a transit intended to have every chrism of legality, by writing out the appropriate documents. [80] Considering his

functions, no doubt Amaury assisted Louis IX at some crucial moments, supervised the examinations to have the certainty that the right relics were being sent, and then organised the security measures during transport.

The sources of the Templar trials, alone, do not allow us to establish this important Templar's parentage with certainty, and we have to be content with knowing that he was of the house of La Roche, a noble family who had taken part in the Fourth Crusade and established its own fiefdom near Athens. And it was near Athens, according to a document dated 1205 which reached us thanks to a copy made by the Archbishop of Monreale (Sicily), Monsignor Benedetto D'Acquisto, the nobleman Othon de La Roche had decided to keep the most precious object in the booty he had taken from the sack of Constantinople, that is the Shroud of Jesus Christ. The document is a letter written to Pope Innocent III by Theodoros Angelos, a brother of Michael, despot of Epirus and member of the deposed and exiled Byzantine imperial family, demanding from the Pope at least the return of the most sacred objects. [81]

The diplomatic form of the letter certainly seems to be genuine, a Latin translation from a Greek original: the Byzantine imperial chancellery produced their official documents in Greek, but attached to them Latin translations, and probably the unknown scribe only copied out the latter. No expert until now has challenged its authenticity, and it seems to agree in form with other Byzantine documents of the time, at least to judge by such formulas as calling the Roman Pontiff "Pope of Old Rome", or the heading scheme which specialists call illiille.[82] In this context, I would like to mention an interesting fact that might have to do exactly with the presence of the Shroud in the region of Athens. The accurate catalogue of churches in the Empire of Constantinople drawn up by Raymond Janin states that in the neighbourhood of Daphni, on the ancient sacred way that once took pilgrims to the famous temple of Apollo, stood an abbey dedicated to the Mother of God. In a letter of 1209, Pope Innocent III strangely calls this "the church of the Blachernae", that is the very same name of the famous basilica in Constantinople where the crusader Robert de Clari saw the Shroud exhibited just before the sack. The abbey was settled by Cistercian monks from the French town of Bellevaux, which had ties with the La Roche family; and Janin, who has made a detailed study of the history of very many Byzantine religious foundations, could find no explanation for this novel naming of Blachernae, which had nothing what so ever to do with the history of that monastery and seemed to appear out of nowhere on the morrow after the great sack.[83] It would not be surprising if the church of Daphni had been so renamed just by virtue of the unique object it came to hold, which made it somehow a new basilica of the Blachernae.

The last La Roche duke of Athens, also called Othon, died without heirs on 5 October 1308, and was buried in the monastery of Daphni; in all likelihood, the long since Shroud had left his family's possession.[84]

In 1261 the Latin Empire of Constantinople ceased to exist, Greek emperors recovered the throne, and the establishment of fiefdoms also had to be reorganised. In those years, and to be precise from 1260 to 1265, Amaury was the commander of the Temple throughout the whole East, and had therefore great military, political and economic powers. The Fourth Lateran Council had forbidden the trade in relics under pains of excommunication, so the Shroud could never have been sold. After the sack of Constantinople, several precious reliquaries containing tiny fragments of the shroud of Christ had been sold across Europe, and even King Louis IX the Saint had procured one for his treasury at the Sainte-Chapelle; although these were only fragments, these were objects that drew people's devotion and curiosity mightily. It is easy to imagine what would have happened if the existence of the sheet had been made widely known - one of the most famous and celebrated relics in all Christendom. Excommunication could have been avoided by making it a free-will gift or some kind of disguised purchase, but the conveyance had at any rate to be carried out as discreetly as possible.[85] There would have been nothing strange about it if the Order of the Temple, as greedy of relics for Jesus Christ as anyone, had come forward to make an offer to the troubled La Roche family through one of their own kinsmen, offering to take this object as pawn for a monumental sum of money – a sum the La Roche would never have been able to return.

The Templars never exhibited the Shroud to the faithful, never got alms from it, never used it to profit from indulgences, indeed they kept it hidden from most of their own members.

Why, then, did they wish to hold and keep this strange object?

A new Sepulchre

As I explained earlier, there is reason to believe, from the complex information at our disposal, that the Templars may have endowed their little linen string with a new, spiritual meaning, when the Order came into contact with the Shroud and discovered its singular properties, especially the awe-striking "belt of blood". The little belts worn by every member of the Order, which had been in the past consecrated thanks to contact with the stone of the Holy Sepulchre, were now consecrated through contact with the Shroud after Jerusalem was lost. The

Shroud came to be, in a sense, a "new Sepulchre", but as compared with the grave inside the magnificent basilica of Anastasis, it had a much greater power over the imagination; and this power seemed to the Templars to be of vital importance in a truly difficult historical moment.

Between 1198 and 1202, as the French barons were working on the organisation of the new Crusade, Innocent III set up a series of reforming policies to raise the fortunes of Temple and Hospital: after the catastrophic defeat at Hattin by Saladin, the two military orders were on their knees, both because of the loss of fighting men and goods, and because of the immense blow to their image in the eyes of the West, who saw them as the bulwark of Christianity in the Holy Land. The Pope intended to make it easier to join the two orders, and so encourage many lay knights and replenish the ranks of the Templars and Hospitallers. His first step was to broaden certain privileges actually already granted by Innocent II in 1139, especially to allow Templar cemeteries to bury such faithful as wished to be laid to rest there; then came the permission to admit excommunicates into the Temple, a very bold decision that wholly reversed the clearly stated purpose of St. Bernard of Clairvaux at the beginning. Bernard had long fought to stem the spread of Cathar heresy in the Midi, and his preaching had resulted in many conversions, which however had not lasted long. When drafting the Templar rule, the Abbot of Clairvaux was stern: admission to the Temple was totally forbidden to excommunicates, and Templars had no right to accept even alms from such persons as had been placed outside the Catholic communion.[86]

In 1206 this rule was abrogated, and the Temple was opened to these knights, who made up a kind of reserve of energies which could not be exploited because they had been placed outside Christian society. Innocent III had decided that the emergency of the times was enough to justify such an alteration of St. Bernard's precepts, and that in the end one could follow the same rationale seen in his time by Pope Urbanus II when he had called for the first Crusade in 1095: in many countries in Europe, these excommunicated knights lived at the margins of society, eking out a living by enlisting as mercenaries with some mighty lord who employed them to raid his enemies; or indeed they would turn into true bandits, bloodily assaulting peasants and churches. Offering them absolution if they took vows as Templar or Hospitaller brothers meant giving them a second chance: they could save their souls by serving God and the defence of Jerusalem, and what is more they could be turned into a strong resource for the Christian army.

This is a typical instance of a reform carried out with the best intentions and yet ending up doing serious damage. Innocent III was fully within his rights in

rewriting Templar statutes; a principle contained

precisely in their statutes declared that the Pope was the master of the order and their lord after Jesus Christ. [87] Pontiffs did not in actual fact ever meddle in Order affairs, and the interference mentioned a few pages ago to have Amaury de La Roche made Preceptor of France is probably the only notable case of this kind; at any rate, and to judge by the tone of the Papal missive, it seems that it had been the Templars themselves who had suggested this reform. The move was completed when another pontifical letter was issued, sanctioning that the privileges bestowed on knights intending to become Templars were extended automatically to their whole family. In 1213, Innocent III was to complain about excessively broad interpretations of the Papal will, but it is a fact that the way his letter had been drafted all but encouraged that kind of reading. [88]

Within certain limits, the Temple had become a kind of free port, a privileged pathway to redemption, as well as good for sheltering from persecution. When you consider how widespread the Cathar heresy was in southern France, and the climate that was created early in the Albigensian Crusade, it is obvious that many families with Cathar connections could not take the opportunity offered by this amnesty fast enough; to be legally protected against the Inquisition, but also against the hard men from the north who were taking advantage of theological conflicts to strike at their political and economic interests. Many passages in ancient sources show that the atmosphere had become nightmarish, and had brought about absurd situations. For instance, it had become quite dangerous to call on the Holy Spirit, for it was known that Cathars recognised only one sacrament, the transmission of the Holy Spirit by laying-on of hands. In the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly underlines the power and sacredness of the Spirit for Christians, but still they preferred not to so much as mention him at all, as if he did not exist; even in the most intimate moments there was someone who listened, made guesses, and then laid information before the authorities. A knight's wife from Cestayrols near Albi was declared a suspect because, in the agony of childbirth, she had cried out: "Holy Spirit of God, help me!" In 1254, a man from Montgey in Tarn, gravely ill, called on the Holy Spirit to be healed, but his brother made him shut up lest he attracted the interest of inquisitors. [89]

We cannot currently make firm estimates, but it seems more than likely that some sons from aristocratic families with Cathar connections were made Templars and so extended the mantle of papal protection; and it may be that not every one of these men changed their religious ideas, when you consider that they had entered the Temple to stay alive. Unorthodox talk or behaviour from this or that Templar leader may have roused some scandal among the laity and in

any case did the Order's public image, already damaged by widespread envy at their many privileges, no good.

The file of Philip the Fair's charges against the arrested Templars of France includes an accusation that the priests of the Order would not consecrate the Host during Mass; a charge that makes no sense if taken in a general manner, for many ordinary folks went to Mass in Templar churches and such an oddity in the liturgy would never have gone unnoticed. It is however possible that Nogaret's hired spies had picked up sporadic matter from Heaven knows where, isolated and very rare rumours which however must have looked from the prosecution's viewpoint like manna from heaven.

Cathars, in fact, did not celebrate the Eucharist, because according to their doctrine the body of Christ had nothing important about it; it was simply a kind of empty shell; nor had there ever been a real sacrifice of Christ that it should be right to renew or to commemorate by celebrating a sacrament. The Christ, the heavenly messenger of God, could not in their view die at all, for his nature was not compounded of the vile, useless mortal detritus that forms men; death may have welcomed the man Jesus, the physical carrier in which the Christ had dwelled for a while, and whom to the Cathars had no importance at all. In effect, during the trial some testimonies were collected which pointed in that direction: during a ceremony of admission, a preceptor said to the new-made Templar that God had never died.

It is probably this kind of broken-off reports of hearsay that led an Oriental scholar such as Hammer-Purgstall to write things like *Baphometus Revelatus*: reading the few sources then available on the trial, he may have guessed at the connection between the charges made against the Templars and those against the Cathars. Then the cultural fashions of his time, the deforming pressure of Metternich's interests, and for that matter a highly questionable method of research, led him to exercise his fantasy till he imagined a whole Templar order turning its back en masse on Catholicism and secretly reviving dark and extremely ancient rites.

Today, an overall examination of all the sources on the trial allows us to know that this was at best a tiny phenomenon, limited in time and restricted to the French Midi, where repression against heresy was most intense and above all most bitterly political. The Templars of Italy, of Spain, of Germany, of Scotland and England, of the Slav countries, of Syria-Palestine and Armenia, so far as we can tell, were wholly untouched. It was only south France that saw a momentary and extremely limited spread of heterodox ideas on the Christ, tied to a precise

historical moment and to Innocent III's amnesty: a negligible phenomenon, a tiny spark which however Nogaret was in time to use to start a forest fire.

Thomas and the wound

Curiously, the area where the heretical contamination was broadest was also the one where the cult of Christ's Shroud was most strongly rooted in the Temple. If the Templars had the opportunity to keep the precious object, it is clear that they wished to keep it for the same reasons that had led Constantine VII to make it the most venerated relic in Constantinople: it was a deadly weapon against the spread of heresies, a far stronger antidote than the preachers' sermons or even the fires of the Inquisition. No learned debates could have controlled mediaeval men, often illiterate but endowed with an intuition we cannot fully understand today. The Cathars said that the Christ had no true human body or blood; once properly unfolded, the sheet of the Shroud shows the tormented body of the Passion just as the Gospels describe it. Above all, one could see the blood, a lot of blood, scattered everywhere. By the tear among the ribs, indeed, the flow was of stunning size, and the mind could not but go back to the words of the Gospels. In the Last Supper, Jesus had said: "This is my blood for the new and everlasting Covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins".[90]

That outpoured blood was still there for everyone to see, soaked through the linen of the Shroud. It could be seen, touched, kissed. It was the best remedy against all heresies. Two centuries later, Martin Luther would write: "The Cross alone is our theology." It is a sentence distant in time, but it embodies excellently what the Shroud meant for the Templars. One testimony given in the Poitiers trial before the Pope seems to show exactly this dynamic: brother Pons de Brozet, Preceptor of Provence, welcomed a young recruit into the Temple in 1288, and after the obligatory liturgy of the admission ceremony, shows him, first the face above the altar, then a cross. Then he tells him that he should not believe in the Cross, but in that Face, because God never died, and makes him adore and kiss the Face "as relics are kissed". Pons de Brozet is one of the dignitaries who had the personal keeping of the Shroud; if we visualise the scene with the Shroud folded in the container-reliquary that only showed the face, then everything starts to make sense: the miraculous image that shows how Jesus was not in the Sepulchre for more than three days, the image that bears the sign of Jonas, that shows the Resurrection. Heretics preached that the man Jesus had died, that that was the natural end of man, and that flesh could not rise again. But

a Templar does not have to listen to such false alternative doctrines, must never believe that everything ended with the crucifixion. The crucifixion was only the beginning: the idol, the mysterious image that bears the marks of Resurrection, is its evidence.[91]

Another important fact must be noted. The bloodstains left on the Shroud correspond to dense flows, some of which – especially those to the face, the nail wounds, and the hit to the ribs – come from broken veins and are the remains of a very abundant flow. Today, however, nothing is left of the large, solid coagulations that the linen once bore, as if the stuff had lost, after unknown events, most of that thickened, solidified blood that originally stood in solid masses in relief on the sheet, like the crusts of so many wounds. In Constantinople, dispersed in the capital's over one thousand churches, there were many reliquaries claiming to contain a part of the Holy Blood of Jesus, and many of them were taken to Europe by crusaders after the sack of 1204. This vast movement of the relics of the Blood excited intensely the imaginative faculties of mediaeval man, because it was intimately connected with the mystery of the Eucharist; and it could have influenced the transformation of the legends of the Holy Grail, which in the most ancient versions is nothing more than a miraculous dish described in some Celtic sagas. However, just in the years that follow the Fourth Crusade, it begins to be celebrated as the Cup of the Last Supper, or else as the cup in which Joseph of Arimathea was supposed to have collected the blood coming from the side of the crucified Jesus. [92] In any case, these reliquaries of the Blood were small ampoules made of crystal or rock crystal that contained minute amounts of dried blood. Considering their Byzantine origin, everything suggests that that dried blood had been scraped from the crusts once present on the Shroud; in that sense, those relics were true, that is, they contained the blood from an object believed to be the true Shroud of Christ, certified by the authority of the Emperor of Constantinople. If that was the case, we are not surprised to hear of people spending astronomical sums to have them. [93]

If the order of the Temple suffered a certain contamination from heretics, it is not strange that it should think of gaining a powerful medicine of faith to fight its war in a quiet, private, invisible way. The Order's high dignitaries carried out delicate diplomatic missions for the Emperors of Byzantium, they knew well the imperial palace of Constantinople, with its hall of wonders. Concerned at the spread of Cathar thought, that had shot through a large part of Christian society and of the Catholic Church, the Order of the Temple thought that the disbelief of some of its own members could be cured in the simple, effective way that had once conquered St. Thomas. The Apostle had declared that he would not believe

Jesus had risen from the dead unless he had first seen and touched the open wound in his side; so too Templars fallen into doubt would have been saved by the ability to see with their own eyes the signs of Christ's humanity imprinted in that amazing relic. To see and also to touch, as we said: according to the sources, the Templars used to worship the Shroud with a liturgy that included kissing the wounds on the feet. [94]

In the light of these thoughts it no longer seems so strange that the investigators who led the Languedoc enquiry came down so hard on issues of heresy and sorcery, in such an excessive way as to have no comparison elsewhere: maybe in those territories there had been whispers of scandal, hearsay or even only unorthodox behaviours, which had roused the shadow of suspicion. Even if it had been only one case or two, one or two cases would have been enough in that territory.

It is curious that many modern believers tend to look on the Shroud of Turin as evidence that Jesus actually did rise; the Templars, on the other hand, if they kept it at all as the evidence suggests, sought in it an utterly different truth. That Jesus had risen they had never doubted; what they needed was the evidence that the Christ had indeed died. The Templar leaders' choice to keep the existence and cult of the Shroud secret proved in time a tragic mistake. Although it is unfair to write history from the point of view of 20-20 hindsight and to start imagining what might have happened if-if-if, some facts are absolutely evident: the Shroud's identity, and its charisma, were more than enough to protect the Order of the Temple from any attempt to charge them for crimes against religion. Had the world known with certainty what the mysterious Templar idol really was, had they seen it and seen the veneration with which it was treated, the black legend of Baphomet would never have been born and all of Philip the Fair's other charges would have shrunk to the level of backstairs courtier chit-chat.

At present the sources we have do not allow us to understand when exactly the Shroud came into the Temple's possession, and when it left it to pass to other guardians: the one thing we do know is that it stayed

within the order for some time and that it left indelible traces in its spirituality. Some authors, such as Dubarle, Zaccone, Raffard de Brienne and Alessandro Piana, believe that after the sack of Constantinople the sheet passed directly into the hands of the house of La Roche, and I also share this idea so far as the available sources are concerned; historian Willy Müller on the other hand believes that the Shroud was kept in Germany for some time and had something to do with the Emperor Frederick II, and on his side it must be said that the Shroud's face has left very clear traces in the German Templar tradition, which placed it on the verso of the seal of the Preceptors of Germany. All these

reconstructions cannot really be said to contradict each other; they are only the distinct stages in a long journey of which, in the end, we still know very little. [95]

In fact, the history of the Shroud remains open to hypotheses until the midfourteenth century, when it becomes the object of so many written accounts as to leave no space for doubt; for the previous centuries, Ian Wilson's reconstruction is indubitably the one that shows the highest degree of likelihood and probability. At any rate, whether or not it was the same as the celebrated *mandylion*, the presence of the Shroud in the imperial collection in Constantinople is certified by various sources. In 1200/1201 the city was in chaos due to the coup that had overthrown the Emperor Isaac II Angelos;

a riot shook the imperial palace, and the custodian of relics, the historian Nicholas Mesarites, had to face down the rioters to prevent their profaning the chapel of Pharos. He managed to calm the soldiers down by appealing to the extreme sacredness of the place: the objects collected within made up a new Jerusalem, something that kept the earth in touch with the heavens, and had to stay outside any political issue. Nicholas describes the Shroud unmistakably, as a funeral sheet where the image of Jesus was outlined as a shape without border lines. "It is made of linen, a humble and simple material, and still has the smell of myrrh. It cannot perish, because it covered the dead body, with ill defined borders, naked, covered with myrrh after the Passion". [96]

That the linen could still carry the smell of the funeral perfumes in the 12th century is not as surprising as it sounds: in the 1500s, some excavations in Rome opened up imperial age graves, more than a thousand years old, and found several mummified corpses. The excavators' accounts remark on the clearly perceivable smell of funeral perfumes. [97]

That was the last description of the Shroud in the imperial chapel at Byzantium.

^[1] Baima Bollone, *Sindone e scienza*, p. 99.

^[2] Baima Bollone and Gaglio, *Applicazioni di tecniche*, pp. 169-174; Baima Bollone, Jorio and Massaro, *La determinazione del gruppo*, pp. 175-178 e Id., *Ulteriori ricerche*, pp. 9-13; Id., *Gli ultimi giorni*, pp. 95-97; Heller and Adler, *Blood on the Shroud*, pp. 2742-2744; Adler, *Aspetti chimico-fisici*, pp. 165-184.

^[3] Ps. 22, 17-19; Puech, Notes, pp. 103-124.

^[4] Naveh, *The Ossuary Inscriptions*, pp. 33-37; Tzaferis, *Jewish Tombs*, pp. 18-32; Puech, *Notes*, p. 120 e nota 33.

^[5] Radermakers, *Croce*, pp. 378-379; de Fraine e Haudebert, *Crocifissione*, col. 379; Sabbatini Tumolesi, *Gladiatorum Paria*, for instance p.107, nota 79.

^[6] Blinzler, *Il processo di Gesù*; Brown, *La morte del Messia*, pp.1354-1357; Martini, *La condanna a morte di Gesù*, pp. 543-557; Miglietta, *Il processo a Gesù*, pp. 767-784; Id., *Riflessioni*, pp. 147-184;

Fabbrini, *La deposizione di Gesù*, pp. 97-178.

- [7] Baima Bollone, *Sindone e scienza*, pp. 99-100.
- [8] Savio, Pellegrinaggio di san Carlo, p. 436.
- [9] Tommasi, I Templari e il culto delle reliquie, p. 202.
- [10] Baima Bollone, *Sindone e scienza*, pp. 101-103.
- [11] Luke 24, 46 (Nestle-Aland, p. 753).
- [12] John 2, 1-11; Mt 12, 38-42; Dulaey, I simboli cristiani, pp. 70-91.
- [13] Schottmüller, II, p. 156.
- [14] Villanueva, *Viage literario*, V, pp. 207-221
- [15] Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg. Aven. 48, c. 441v, edited by Schottmüller, II, pp. 57-58; Curzon, *Règle*, § 469; Tréffort, *L'Eglise carolingienne et la mort*, pp. 67-70, 74.
- [<u>16</u>] Barber, *The New Knighthood*, pp. 244-245.
- [17] Berkovits, *Illuminierte Handschriften*, pp. 19-20; Bazelaire, Alonso and Castex, *Nouvelle interpretation*, pp. 8-23.
- [18] Pellicori and Evans, *The Shroud*, pp. 34-43.
- [19] Brandys, Via Crucis, coll. 1348-1350; Berre, Via Crucis, pp. 1310-1311.
- [20] Baima Bollone, *Sindone e scienza*, pp. 94-96.
- [21] I chose not to quote by name this sort of book, because their science-fiction taste is out of keeping with the guiding principles of this text. Broad and scholarly treatments of the issue include Baima Bollone, *Sindone e scienza*; Barberis-Savarino, *Sindone, radiodatazione*; Marinelli and Petrosillo, *La sindone, storia di un enigma*; Zaccone, *Sulle tracce della sindone*.
- [22] Demurger, Jacques de Molay, pp. 19-24.
- [23] Marion e Courage, *La sacra sindone*, pp. 104-108.
- [24] Ibid. pp. 108-123.
- [25] Among the most up to date are Emanuela Marinelli, *La Sindone*, and Marco Tosatti, *Inchiesta sulla sindone*, both published in 2009.
- [26] Adler, *Updating*, pp. 223-228; Gove et al., *A Problematic Source*, pp. 504-507.
- [27] Papini Stati Silvae, recensuit Aldus Marastoni.
- [28] See for instance Teodorsson, *The Phonology*, pp. 197-199; Milani, pp. 221-229.
- [29] Baima Bollone, *Sindone e scienza*, pp. 132-137.
- [30] Tamburelli, *La sindone e l'informatica*, pp. 240-254; Id., *Studio della sindone*, pp. 1135-1149; Marastoni, *Le scritte*, fig. 4.
- [31] Schaeder, Nazarhnóς, coll. 833-848; Eusebio di Cesarea, Onomasticon, 138, 24 ss..
- [32] Marion and Courage, *Nouvelles découvertes*, foreword by Christian Imbert (Director in chief, Institut d'Optique e dell'École Superieure d'Optique d'Orsay), pp. 7-10.
- [33] Marion, *Discovery of Inscriptions*, pp. 2308-2313; Marion and Courage, *Nouvelles découvertes*, pp. 218-226.
- [34] Marion and Courage, *Nouvelles découvertes*, pp. 11-12.
- [35] I am grateful to Émile Puech and to Simone Venturini for helping me with this reading. To be correct, I wish to underline that both scholars received photographs of simple Hebraic writings and identified them without having any idea that they were signs found on the Turin shroud. This procedure was required to receive unpolluted views, free from any conditioning that might arise from the history of this famous object: for during my research, I found out personally that the radio-carbon affair has had a disastrously polluting effect on the cultural landscape, creating a prejudice so powerful as to darken the finest, most objective scholarly minds
- [36] Messina and Orecchia, *La scritta in caratteri ebraici*, pp. 83-88.
- [37] Kaplan, Le Linceul de Turin, pp. 19-22.
- [38] Simonsohn, *The Apostolic* See, pp. 39-40.
- [39] Ibid, pp. 48-50.
- [40] Ibid., pp. 51-60.
- [41] Vauchez, *Contestazioni*, pp. 442-455, at pp. 447-448.
- [42] Second letter of Peter, 1, 20-3, 17.

- [43] Simonetti, Note di cristologia gnostica, pp. 529-553; si veda estesamente *Testi gnostici in lingua greca e latina*.
- [44] Clemente Alessandrino, *Stromata*, II 114, 3-6.
- [45] Luke 8, 2-3; At 6, 1-6; Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Christians of Smyrna, VI, 1-2
- [46] Dubois, *Valentin*, coll. 146-156; Mercati, *Anthimi Nicomediensis*, pp. 87-98; Janssens, *Héracléon*, pp. 101-151; Blanc, *Le Commentaire d'Héracléon*, pp. 81-124; Brown, *Giovanni*, pp. LXVII-LXXI; Peretto, *L'inno cristologico*, pp. 257-274.
- [47] Grossi, Lo gnosticismo e i Padri della Chiesa, pp. 69-80; Segalla, Vangeli canonici e vangeli gnostici, pp. 47-68; Gianotto, Gli scritti di Nag Hammadi, pp. 36-46; Filoramo, La gnosi ieri e oggi, pp. 21-35.
- [48] Mayer, *Pauliciani*, coll. 996-997; Di Fonzo, Bogomili, coll. 1759-1760; Carile, *Potere e simbologia*, pp. 432-433; Kazhdan, *Bisanzio e la sua civiltà*, pp. 97-99; Patlagean, *Contestazioni*, pp. 434-442.
- [49] Patlagean, Contestazioni, p. 436; Vauchez, Contestazioni, pp.449-450.
- [50] Further reading on these tendencies: Brown, *Giovanni*, pp. XXII-XLIII; Segalla, *La verità storica dei Vangeli*, pp. 195-234.
- [51] Mattheu Paris, *Historia maior*, c. 290, in Potthast, *Regesta Pontificum*, I, p. 450; Spadafora, Veronica, coll. 1044-1048; Pfeiffer, *Le voile de sainte Véronique*, pp. 127-131; Paschalis Schlömer, *Le «sindon» et la «Véronique»*, pp. 151-164.
- [52] Pesci, Bolsena, coll. 1817-1819.
- [53] Meschini, *Note sull'assegnazione della viscontea*, pp. 635-655 (with a rich and well up to date bibliography).
- [54] Chiffoleau, *Vie et mort de l'hérésie*, pp. 73-99; Griffe, *Le catharisme*, pp. 215-236; Becamel, *Le catharisme*, pp. 237-251.
- [55] Da Milano, Albigesi, coll. 708-712; D'Amato, Sacconi, Raniero, coll. 1530-1531; Duvernoy, Le catharisme en Languedoc, pp. 27-56; Henriet, Du nouveau sur l'Inquisition, pp. 159-173; Dossat, Les cathares d'après les documents, pp. 72-77.
- [56] Curzon, La Règle, § 226.
- [57] Frale, *La quarta crociata e il ruolo dei Templari*, pp. 447-484.
- [58] Defremery, *Mémoires d'Histoire Orientale*, pp. 363-364; *Riant*, *Études sur les derniers temps*, pp. 388-389; Barber, *The Templars and the Turin Shroud*, p. 222.
- [59] Among the earliest mentions, it appears in Saint-Gilles in 1266, in Valence in 1268, in Richarenches in 1272, in Albon in 1278, in Avignon in 1280, and so on; cf. Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, pp. 250, 251, 255, ecc.
- [60] In Germany in 1271, on the German preceptors' seals, in Bulst-Thiele, *Sacrae Domus*, pp. 272-274; in Portugal in 1274 and in Puglia nel 1292 (Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, pp. 256 e 254).
- [61] In Gastina (Frale, L'interrogatorio ai Templari, p. 259) and in Limassol (Michelet, Le Procès II, 290).
- [62] Michelet, *Procès*, II, pp. 398-400.
- [63] Ripert du Puy: 1290 e 1291 (Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, pp. 246 e 249).
- [64] In 1266 (ibid. p. 250) and 1271 (p. 1251); before 1268 (p.262); undated (Finke, II, p. 324).
- [65] 1288: Schottmüller, II, p. 29, and Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, p. 270; 1289: Finke, II, p. 321; undated, Finke, II, p. 319 e Schottmüller, II, p. 50; 1290 or 1291: Schottmüller, II, p. 67.
- [66] 1288 (Schottmüller, II, p. 28); 1298 (Schottmüller, II, p. 70); 1300 or 1301 (Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, p. 245); undated (Finke, II, p. 323); 1300 (Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, p. 253).
- [67] 1291: Frale, *L'interrogatorio ai Templari*, p. 265; 1305: ibid. p. 247.
- [68] Bulst-Thiele, *Sacrae domus*, p. 235, nota 11.
- [69] Delaville Le Roulx, *Documents concernant les Templiers*, pp. 26-30: the source suggests that the bond between the two de Fos and the Grand Master was close (*frere Recelins de Fox*, *frere Jofroiz de Foz compagnon dou Maistre*).
- [<u>70</u>] Curzon, *La Règle*, § 82.
- [71] Ibid., §§ 86, 152, 368...
- [72] Finke, II, p. 319.
- [73] Michelet, Le Procès, II, 191.
- [74] Olivier de La Roche (1226-1227): Paris, Archives Nationales, Layettes du Trésor des Chartes, II, p.

- 117, n. 1914, quoted in Trudon des Ormes, *Liste des maisons*, p. 57. I thank Luigi Boneschi for the suggestions and materials he has offered me on the subject of this dignitary.
- [75] Platelle, *Luigi IX*, coll. 320-338; Curzon, *Le Régle*, §§ 77-119; Bulst-Thiele, *Sacrae domus*, p. 245, act of May 31, 1261; Delaville Le Roulx, *Documents concernant les Templiers*, p. 34.
- [76] Guiraud, *Registres d'Urbain IV*, t. II, nn. 760, 761, 773; *Registres de Clément IV*, nn. 855, 1253, 1263; Runciman, *Storia delle crociate*, II, pp. 902-933.
- [77] Servois, *Emprunts de Saint Louis*, pp. 290-293.
- [78] Duchesne, *Historiae Francorum scriptores coaetanei*, V, pp. 390-391.
- [79] Michelet, Les Procès II, pp. 401.
- [80] Riant, Exuviae, pp. 22-23, 52. .
- [81] Rinaldi, *Un documento*, pp. 109-113.
- [82] Pieralli, *La corrispondenza diplomatica*, for instance pp. 41, 43, 45-46. It must be borne in mind that this is a private letter, and thus much freer in form than one would expect from an official document of the imperial chancellery.
- [83] Janin, Les Églises, pp. 310-311; Fedalto, La Chiesa latina in Oriente, I, p. 299.
- [84] Rodd, The Princes of Achaia, II, p. 119.
- [85] Riant, *Exuviae*, p. 7.
- [86] Curzon, La Règle, § 13.
- [87] Ibid., § 475.
- [88] Frale, *La quarta crociata e il ruolo dei Templari*, pp. 454-466.
- [89] For instance Mt, 12, 28; Mc, 3, 29, etc. Dossat, Les cathares d'après l'Inquisition, pp. 81-82.
- [90] Mt, 26, 27-28.
- [91] Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg. Aven. 48, f. 441r; Schottmüller, II, p. 29.
- [92] About the legend's development, see Scavone, *British King Lucius*, pp. 101-142; Loomis, *The Grail*, pp. 165-248.
- [93] Riant, *Exuviae*, for example X, 48, 61, 96, 107, 113, 124, 149, ecc.
- [94] Paris, Archives Nationales, J 413 n. 25, unnumbered folios (f. 9); Finke, II, pp. 323-324.
- [95] Raffard de Brienne, Les duc d'Athènes et le Linceul, pp. 171-176; Dubarle, Le Linceul de Turín, pp.
- 173-176; Zaccone, Le manuscrit 826, pp. 214-216. Müller, Festliche Begegnungen, I, pp. 2-241.
- [96] Nikolaos Mesarites, Die Palast-revolution, p. 30, cit. in Wilson, Holy Faces, pp. 154-155, note 30.
- [97] Chioffi, Mummificazione e imbalsamazione, p. 63



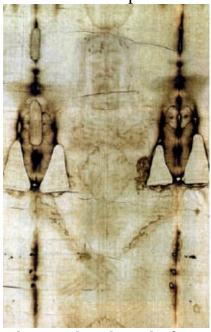
Above: The human face of the shroud with traces of Scripture in Greek and Latin, identified by André Marion and Anne-Laure Courage.



Above: The Shroud of Turin: the pale, indistinct, yellowish image perceived by the naked eye, is changed by photography into a clear, hyper-realistic picture, full of striking detail.



Above: A Matteo Planiso miniature depicting the Creator as a man with two faces. Vatican Apostolic Library, *ms Vat. lat* 3550, *f.* 5v.



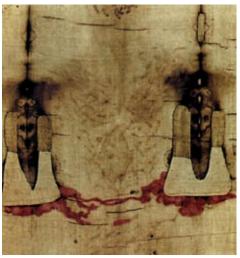
Above: The Shroud of Turin.



Above: Innocent III wrote a hymn to celebrate the Veronica, a famous image of the Face of Jesus kept in Rome.



Above: Knights of the Temple on a war footing. Miniature from a manuscript from the 13th century with the *Cantigas* of King Alfonso the Wise.



Above: The so-called "belt of blood" on the Shroud.



Above: A shroud with the exact kind of holes the Shroud of Turin has is represented in a miniature of the striking Pray manuscript.



Above: From the earliest days, Christians used to keep portraits of Jesus. This icon was preserved by the monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai. Even a layman can tell that they are drawn from realistic portraits.



Above: A jar-like object (the same type found at Qumran) was the first container of the shroud, according to a reconstruction made by Aldo Guerreschi and Michele Salcito.



Above: Miniature from a manuscript depicting the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII receiving the holy *mandylion* on his arrival from Edessa.



Above: Byzantine miniature of the 12th century manuscript Rossiano Greco 251 of the Vatican Library.

Abbreviations for series and periodicals

"AC" - "Archaeological Chemistry. American Chemical Society Symposium Series"

"AOL" - "Archives de l'Orient Latin"

"Apocripha" - "Apocrypha. Revue Internationale des Littératures Apocryphes"

ARAL - "Atti della Reale Accademia Lucchese"

BAR - "Biblical Archaeology Review"

BCIELT - "Bulletin du Centre International d'Études sur le Linceul de Turin"

BÉFAR - "Bibliothèque de l'École Française d'Athènes et de Rome"

"Bib"- "Biblica"

Bible - *La Bibbia*, Latest version from the original texts, with introductions and notes from.A. Ghirlanda, P. Gironi, F. Pasquero, G. Ravasi, P. Rossano and S. Virgulin; Cinisello Balsamo 1987 [Translator's note: Biblical passages have been copied from the Authorized/ King James Version]

"Bib Sacr" - "Biblioteca Sacra"

"Biblio" - "Bibliologia"

BS - Bibliotheca Sanctorum, ed. F. Caraffa, 12 vols., Rome 1961-1969, fourth reprint 1998

"CA" - Cahiers Archéologiques

"CA.AMA" - Cahiers Archéologiques. Fouilles de l'Antiquité et Moyen Age

Catholicisme - Catholicisme hier, aujourd'hui, demain, edited by G. Jacquemet, 7 vol., Paris 1948-2000

"CAV" - "Collectanea Archivi Vaticani"

"CdF" - "Cahiers de Fanjeaux"

"CHR" - "Catholic Historical Review"

"Co" - "Credere oggi"

DACL - Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie, publié sous la direction du R.me dom F. Cabrol, tome VI, Paris 1822

DBE - Deutsche Biographische Enzyklopädie

DDC - Dictionnaire de droit canonique, publié sous la direction de R. Naz, 7 voll., Paris 1935-1965

DEB - Dizionario Enciclopedico della Bibbia, diretto da R. Penna, Rome 2000

DHGÉ - Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géografie écclesiastique, dir. par A. Baudrillart, voll. I-XXVIII, Paris 1912-2003

DIP - Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione, diretto da G.Pelliccia e G. Rocca, 10 voll., Rome 1974-2003

DS - Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et de mystique: doctrine et histoire, publié sous la direction de M. Viller, 17 voll., Paris 1937-1994

DTC - Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, sous la direction de A. Vacant, E. Mangenot et E. Amann, Paris 1923-1940

EAM - Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Rome 1991-2002

- EC: Enciclopedia Cattolica, diretta da P. Paschini, 12 voll., Firenze 1948-1954
- EP : Enciclopedia dei Papi, a cura dell'Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 3 voll., Rome 2000

Finke - Finke, H., *Papsttum und Untergang des Templerordens*, 2 vol., Münster 1907

GEIB - Grande Enciclopedia illustrata della Bibbia, Casale Monferrato 1997

GLNT - Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento, ed. italiana a cura di F. Montagnini, G. Scarpat e O. Soffritti, 11 voll., Brescia 1977

GLS - Il Grande Libro dei Santi, dizionario enciclopedico diretto da C. Leonardi, A. Riccardi e G. Zarri, a cura di E. Guerriero e D. Tuniz, 3 voll., Cinisello Balsamo 1998

"HTR" - "Harvard Theological Review"

"IEJ" - "Israel Exploration Journal"

JE - The Jewish Encyclopedia, directed by I. Singer, 2 vols., London 1901-1906

"JMH" - "The Journal of Medieval History"

"JSNT" - "Journal for the Study of the New Testament"

"JTS" - "Journal of Theological Studies"

"LM" - "Le Muséon"

LTK - Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, begründet von M. Buchberger, Freiburg 1993-2001

"MÉFR" - "Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome"

"MSR" - "Mélanges de science religieuse"

Nestle-Aland - Vangeli e Atti degli apostoli. Greco, latino, italiano, testo greco di Nestle-Aland, traduzione interlineare di A. Bigarelli, testo latino della Vulgata

Clementina, testo italiano della Nuovissima versione della Bibbia, a cura di P. Beretta, Cinisello Balsamo 2005. [Translator's note: Greek, Vulgate Latin and Italian versions of the Gospels]

"NIMPR" - "Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research B"

NTS - "New Testament Studies"

"ÖAW" - "Österreichische Akademie des Wissenschaftes"

"OE" - "Optical Engineering"

OM - Scritti in onore di Orsolina Montevecchi, a cura di E. Bresciani, G. Geraci, S. Pernigotti e G. Susini, Bologna 1981

"Op. Epigr." - "Opuscula Epigraphica"

"PEQ" - "Palestine Exploration Quarterly"

PG - Patrologia Graeca

PL - Patrologia Latina

"RA" - "Recherches Augustiniennes"

"RB" - "Revue Biblique"

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"RÉB" - "Revue des Études Bibliques"
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"RÉJ" - "Revue des Études Juives"

"RFIC" - "Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica"

"RHR" - "Revue de l'Histoire des Religions"

"RILT" - "Revue Internationale du Linceul de Turin"

"Riv Bib" - "Rivista Biblica"

"RJK" - "Römische Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte"

"RQ" - "Revue de Qumran"

"RSLR" - "Rivista di storia e di letteratura religiosa"

"RSR" - "Recherches de Sciences Religieuses"

"SBE" - "Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica"

"SBF" - "Studium Biblicum Franciscanum"

Schottmüller - Schottmüller K., *Der Untergang des Templerordens*, 2 vols., Berlin 1887

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"SDB" - "Supplément au dictionnaire de la Bible"
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"SDHI" - "Studia et documenta historiae et iuris"

"SEG" - "Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum"

"SM" - "Studia Monastica"

"SP" - "Studia Patavina"

"SRDT" - "Supplemento alla Rivista Diocesana Torinese"

"SSI" - "Shroud Spectrum International"

"ST" - "Studi e testi"

"VC" - "Vetera Christianorum"

"ZKG" - "Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte"

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PUBLISHED IN 2011 BY MAVERICK HOUSE PUBLISHERS.

Maverick House, Office 19, Dunboyne Business Park, Dunboyne, Co. Meath, Ireland.

info@maverickhouse.com http://www.maverickhouse.com

First published in Italian as I Templari E La Sindone Di Cristo by Società editrici il mulino.

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